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ABSTRACT

This book is part of a series of case studies that demonstrate better ways to educate Ohio's students. The case study is part of the Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project, designed to support significant school-reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. The text presents a case study based on a middle school in southwestern Ohio. It opens with an overview of a typical day at the school and describes the local education community. The book discusses how the middle school's vision was created and how the school tapped into the TLC Project reform network. It outlines professional development at the school and the advancement of teacher and administrator leadership. The text details the structures for success that were implemented at the school, such as the school's governance structure, the principal's advisory committee, faculty meetings, the parent-teacher group, scheduling, technology for communication and instruction, and the dialogic decision-making process that made reform possible. The report examines the tensions inherent in the transformation process and some of the side effects of change. It concludes with an overview of research on school reform and the vision, commitment, and resources that are necessary for bringing about change. An appendix describes the study's methodology. (RJM)

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Teachers-Leaders, Trust, and Technology

The Case Study of Talawanda Middle School

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TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

TEACHER-LEADERS, TRUST, AND TECHNOLOGY: THE CASE STUDY OF TALAWANDA MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Ohio Department of Education
Columbus, Ohio
1999

The Case Study of Talawanda Middle School

Dear Readers:

The 12 Transforming Learning Communities case studies enlighten readers about the search for better ways to educate Ohio's young people. The stories, told by educators themselves, paint a realistic picture of schools in Ohio.

The unique and inspirational perspectives of the school people highlight the triumphs of team spirit, the drive to turn obstacles into opportunities, and the effort to consider complex questions and find answers that lead to higher student achievement. These researchers tell stories of success and frustration in the endeavor to make life better for future generations.

At the core of educational change is a long-term commitment to teaching and learning that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society. The case studies emphasize intense, high-quality professional development; increased service to others; a holistic approach to education; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deepened understanding of the daily work in the classrooms, corridors, and boardrooms of public schools.

The educators at the heart of change encourage us to examine and refresh our views about schools. Sincere thanks is extended to the educators, researchers, students, and concerned citizens for their willingness to examine the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of change.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Nusbaum

Linda C. Nusbaum
Research Project Manager

Transforming Learning Communities Project

FORWARD

The Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project was an initiative funded by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to support significant school reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. Education researchers associated with the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto were contracted to undertake in-depth case studies of school improvement in a select number of schools supported by Ohio's Venture Capital grants. The aim was to understand the school improvement efforts in these schools, and to engage other Ohio educators in the lessons learned from these schools' experiences.

The project title communicates the orientation to the study. "Learning communities" is a metaphor for schools as learning places for everyone (especially students and teachers) who has a stake in the success of schools as educational environments. "Transforming" signifies that the schools are in a process of change, and that the changes they are striving to achieve involve fundamental reforms in teaching and learning, assessment, organization, professional development, and/or governance. Transforming also captures the intent of the project to support — not just to document — the process of change in participating schools.

The TLC Project began in the Spring of 1997. A three-stage process was used to identify and select schools that had demonstrated notable progress in their efforts to implement significant change over the preceding three to five years: (1) solicitation of nominations from ODE staff familiar with the Venture Capital schools, corroborating opinions from independent sources (e.g., Regional Professional Development Center staff), and statistical profiles for nominated schools (e.g., performance and demographic data); (2) telephone interviews with the principal of each nominated school; and (3) ranking of schools according to relevant sampling criteria. Twelve schools were chosen for variation in type (elementary, middle, secondary); location (rural, urban, and suburban from various regions in Ohio); focus for change (e.g., teaching and learning, professional growth, school-community partnerships); school improvement model; and evidence of progress.

The individual case studies were carried out during the 1997/98 school year by teams consisting of at least two members of the school staff and researchers from four Ohio universities and one college that partnered with the schools. Each team designed and implemented a multi-method study of school improvement activities and outcomes in their school learning community. These included interviews, observations, surveys, and documents. While each case study reflected the unique character of school change at each school, the studies employed a common conceptual framework to guide their exploration and analysis of change in these school learning communities. The TLC framework oriented the case study teams to investigate change and change processes in multiple contexts — the classroom, the corridors, and the community — and in relation to three key processes of learning in organizations: collaboration, inquiry, and integration.

The major products of the Transforming Learning Communities Project include 12 individual case study monographs, a cross-case study and handbook, and a companion video at www.ode.ohio.gov.

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Chapter One

Introduction

> *Schools will improve slowly, if at all, if reforms are thrust upon them. Rather, the approach having the most promise, in my judgment, is one that will seek to cultivate the capacity of schools to deal with their own problems, to become largely self-renewing. (John Goodlad, 1984, p. 31)*

In the fall of 1989, faculty from the seventh and eighth grades at Stewart Junior High School and from the sixth grade at Marshall Elementary School began the school year in a brand-new Talawanda Middle School (TMS). This extraordinary team of teacher-leaders had a rich but independent building, history of peer collaboration, professional inquiry, and curriculum integration within their classrooms, buildings, and the community. From the planning stages of the building to the present, the Talawanda City Schools' central office staff and TMS building administrators appear to have, in character and disposition, complemented faculty needs during four distinct evolutionary stages: (1) envisioning the middle school programs and planning the new building; (2) opening the building; (3) acquiring the resources to support professional and program development; and (4) the current period of transformation to "raise the bar."

Beginning in 1986, a series of state of Ohio grants that included Ohio's Classroom of the Future Venture Capital, SchoolNet and, most recently, Raising the Bar have fueled TMS faculty vision, professional development, technology integration, and the current transformative dialogue on block scheduling, advanced technology integration, and school-to-work initiatives. The faculty and administration of TMS are continually re-examining the definition of what it means to be a high-performance, responsive middle school in the twenty-first century. Talawanda Middle School has become a productive learning community with the commitment and capacity to transform itself to meet the emerging needs of the learners and community it serves.

> *We talk among one another to find the support that affirms ourselves and our mission.*
> – A Teacher

I feel that the commitment of all staff has made our school a success. This staff is the most supportive group of people that I have ever worked with. Teachers here want to do a really good job teaching young people. Students drive our curriculum. Students drive all our decisions, whether it be academic, social, or environmental. – A Teacher

My mornings begin by firing up my computer and logging on to FirstClass Client. FirstClass has become an excellent professional forum, particularly the way we are using it here. I have increased contact with teachers throughout the building. There is no sense of isolation. I am aware of every field trip, conference, and meeting. I do feel more a part of the program here. For every minute that I use FirstClass Client, I am getting back 10 minutes in time saved. This makes me the winner with the system. – A Teacher

I feel that my professional development has been greatly enhanced with the Venture Capital Grant. It has been possible to go to conferences. I have been able to bring many new ideas and techniques to my classroom. Listening to other professionals from across the nation has made me realize that I also have something to share with others, too! – A Teacher

There always seems to be a tremendous amount of "good things" happening here! – A Teacher

There are many reasons Talawanda Middle School qualifies as a transformative school culture, where continual improvement remains a core value. These reasons are not new to productive schools or organizations. What makes the Talawanda Middle School story so interesting is the sequence and timing of events that, out of sequence, might have resulted in virtually no lasting impact. First, and almost by accident, a passionate vision found expression in the opportunity for a new building. Then, a newly integrated faculty that needed careful professional nurturing found support from a veteran, caring, experienced building principal transferred from the high school. Soon, but not too soon, a more entrepreneurial administrator encouraged the seeking of external funding for professional development, because there was none available in the district. While this was all transpiring, a small technology project at Miami University was starting a network technology initiative intended to link classrooms and parents through the Internet. TMS was positioned to help shape this vision of connectivity. Simultaneously, a series of state of Ohio grants seeking to advance school performance, collaboration, and computer networks became available in a remarkable four-year sequence to fuel professional development and technology-supported vision. And now, a fully confident faculty is being led by a building principal comfortable with shared decision making, having championed a round of new external funding.

The faculty was ready. Opportunities were seized upon. Grants were written and awarded. Teacher professional development was fueled. And a transformative culture emerged with an Ohio SchoolNet network infrastructure to complement core values of teacher leadership, trust, collaboration,

and student-centered instruction. Clear vision, teacher leadership, administrative leadership, district-wide strategic planning, state funding, professional-development opportunities, school board support, and an exciting Ohio SchoolNet prototype network infrastructure have combined to now position Talawanda Middle School to "raise the bar." These are exciting times at Talawanda Middle School.

Reading the Talawanda Middle School Story

The case study is organized into the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** This section provides an abstract of the case study and provides an overview of the teacher-leaders, trust and technology case study. It describes why the study is organized like it is and what to expect from different sections of the case study.

2. **The Evolution of a Middle School:** A brief history of the local schools and the larger context for acting on a vision; this includes a snapshot of the beginning of the school day.

3. **The Context of Transformation:** This section includes the early shaping of the TMS vision, the planning and implementation of the new TMS building, the constellation and sequence of state of Ohio grants that fueled professional development, related Miami University-Partners in Learning partnership, the Talawanda City Schools Strategic Plan, SchoolNet implementation, and the most recent Raising the Bar funding.

4. **Critical Components: Professionalism and Leadership:** This section focuses on the inherent traits of collegiality, inquiry, and deliberation that seem to characterize TMS. It also introduces the teachers who make up the faculty of Talawanda Middle School and the series of administrators who have provided developmentally significant leadership at TMS. These pages evidence who the Talawanda teachers are, in experience and building commitments, within TMS. They reveal a faculty fully involved in program development, district and building leadership, and extracurricular participation with middle school students.

5. **TMS Structures for Success and Transformation:** This section describes the TMS governance structure, decision making, scheduling, and technology. This section offers rich insight into the topics, energy, participation, and decision-making processes that characterize TMS. If culture is defined as "the way business gets done" then these structures and topics characterize the culture of TMS. TMS has technology as an embedded part of its organizational character. This section discusses the role that technology plays in communication and instruction at TMS.

6. **Tensions in the Transformation Process:** This section discusses factors that reside in the institutional history of TMS that may or may not have contributed to its evolution, current issues under consideration at TMS, and the role and sometimes negative effects of grants in school settings.

7. **The TMS Success Story:** This section discusses the TMS profile in relationship to the accumulated research on effective change in schools, and offers some closing thoughts on the evolution of TMS and conclusions drawn from the case.

A description of the four-phase research plan is included in the Appendix. The TMS case study includes many teacher quotes and committee/decision-making documents. All but a few of the quotes are from teachers at TMS. The teachers took the afternoon of an early release day to thoughtfully respond to an on-line questionnaire developed by the research team. In some instances, we included representative quotes that summarized what several teachers had expressed. We felt it was important to show evidence of teacher diversity, the broad issues considered in meetings, and the reaction to grants that have shaped the culture of TMS.

> *It was not simply the events, but the people who shaped those events that have made the difference! It is hard to ignore the efforts of the many individual teachers who have provided input into our current school policies and procedures. To try to single out a few among the literally hundreds of contributions risks missing the point of our success, namely, that only through the combined effort of each staff member have we made such progress that other schools now look to us for a model of educational success.* – A Teacher

In an early review of the manuscript, readers were asked to answer the following question: "What is the central theme or message of the case story that comes out to you?" The reviewers made the following comments:

> *That the people who have worked there have made a difference.... While the reforms and grants and all have been effective... the people and their passion have made a difference.... That kept coming out loud and clear.* – A Teacher

> *I thought the individuals came out very clear. . . . It's like the effort is there in the study to show 'Yes we're a very diverse group, but we all work together.'* – A Teacher

> *They took a lot of time and space for teacher leadership . . . and to give each teacher voice. . . . And I thought that was very important, 'cause it is not just one single person . . . the success of the teachers depends on them all doing their part. . . .* – A Teacher

We have successfully reported the story we suspected was at TMS if these are the impressions left with reviewers. We believe that the current transformative capacity of TMS has deep roots. We believe TMS has the potential for dramatic impact as a model for how resources and people can interact to create transformative schools. We regard the following comment as the moral of the work:

The Case Study of Talawanda Middle School

> *One thing I thought about and that I think could easily be made into a very positive thing for this case is that professional community, when it is focused on a particular need for change, can be a very productive thing.* – A Researcher

Professional community is a prerequisite for recognizing and acting effectively on opportunities. Professional community, combined with opportunities acted on and captured, rather than lost, is the storyline. How professional community emerged and what professional community has been able to do is the substance of the TMS story.

Chapter Two

The Evolution of a Middle School

Talawanda Middle School was opened in 1989, a brand-new school in a brand-new building designed by the teachers who teach in it. The vision that shaped this school had a national and local context: the national middle school movement, district consolidation, expanding enrollments, threats of split session for elementary schools, and grants. All of these forces came together to create the new school. In this chapter we'll describe the scene of school transformation as well as the planning and implementation of the new building known as Talawanda Middle School. First we begin with a TMS morning snapshot by way of an introduction.

How the Day Begins at Talawanda Middle School

The doors to Talawanda Middle School are unlocked at 6:00 a.m., when the first teacher routinely arrives. At 7:00 a.m., 52 yellow school buses, filled with students from one of Ohio's largest districts as measured by square miles, begin to park next to each other in the parking lot. At 7:08 a.m., the students are released by the drivers and head for the TMS "auditeria." Routinely, the students are greeted at the door by the building's principal and assistant principal. This particular day begins with the principal's interception of one student. "Jenny, let's have a better day than we did yesterday. You are a good student and we want you to be successful." The girl looks up with agreement on her face. Yesterday has spilled forward into today, but the student has been encouraged.

> *Mrs. Bohannon and Mr. Rolfes are there every day. We met yesterday because I had a problem in a class. I figured she would say something to me. She cares about how we do and how we behave. I like her.* – Jenny, TMS student

The students move to the auditeria for seven minutes of what looks like "the yard" to the casual observer. In fact, what is happening in the social day for these middle school students is in its second phase: They probably did some catching up at the bus stop and on the bus ride, but now friends from

across buses are connecting. Students stand in the same places every day; they wait for each other. They enjoy the time they have to catch up, set the social agenda for the day, and prepare to move to their lockers. Homework is being swapped, boyfriends and girlfriends are being discussed, or last night's game or TV could be the topic. One thing is clear: There is personal work to be done, and everyone implicitly agrees that if it's too noisy they won't be able to hear each other — and we can't have that.

The bell rings and the students are off to their lockers, which are decorated and sometimes shared. Lockers are like apartments for preadolescents: the range of decorations reflects a wide span in personal development. Sixth-grade boys have pictures of cars, posters of Michael Jordan, and pictures of Cincinnati Red's baseball players; eighth-grade girls have mirrors and pictures of band members.

At 7:30 a.m., the bell rings for the move to homeroom. And the students move. One of the lingering stories attached to the design of TMS is the narrow hallways: They are too narrow for the number of students who move in them at any one time. Most of the discipline problems come between bells. If students want to hassle someone, they can do it because of the tightness of the hallways. If they want to avoid someone, they have to work at it. They weave, nod, smile, turn away with heads down and up, but they move for the most part without touching. Salmon swimming upstream and down at the same time with a social contract not to touch each other unless you are "buds," "the best of friends," or "*going together*."

Homeroom stretches from 7:35 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. By now most of the 51 teachers and administrators have checked their SchoolNet e-mail for district-wide communications, building-level announcements, personal e-mail, and anything that looks like it affects the early work of the day in system-wide conferences that are open to all faculty. This day is off to a typical start —

History: The Local School Scene

Public school buildings play many roles in their lifetimes, and the school built in 1929 on the corner of Spring and Fairfield Streets in Oxford, Ohio, is no exception. Talawanda High School was opened in January 1930. This building was part of a generation of Great Depression and WWII era school buildings: four floors of thick, poured concrete walls, a brick and stone exterior, wide hallways, high ceilings, and big classrooms. Talawanda High School became Stewart Junior High School in 1956, when a new high school was constructed six blocks south on the corner of Spring Street and Chestnut over what had once been the city landfill.

Marshall Elementary School, on the other hand, has the character of 1950s- and 1960s-era elementary ranch school buildings, with only a ground level. Built outside the Oxford city limits, Marshall has a central hallway and two wings, low ceilings, and more horizontal distance between classrooms.

In 1981, many independent area elementary schools were closed and the school district consolidated. This integrated many of the children and teachers from formerly isolated elementary schools into Kramer, Marshall, and Stewart: Kramer was kindergarten to fifth; all of the sixth graders were together at Marshall; and seventh and eighth graders went to Stewart Junior High.

As in other school districts, money was always a problem. "Levy wars" in the Talawanda City Schools reached back as far as 1968-89 and continued into the mid-1980s. There were two failed levies in 1984 and one again in 1985. Meanwhile, enrollments in the district continued to increase. Buildings in the mid-1980s were bursting at the seams. When a high school levy did not pass, two school board members agreed that a new building needed to be constructed in the district. They walked the district, talking with people about the need for a new building. They built consensus in Oxford city and in the surrounding farmlands. Because of extra school crowding due to the loss of a "Lab School' space at Miami University, students were spread all over the community in buildings not designed for kindergarten-to-fifth education. The prospect of split sessions, with elementary school children coming home at 7:00 p.m., was right around the corner. In 1987, the Talawanda Middle School levy passed.

Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, the teachers in Stewart Junior High School were exploring the meaning and form of the middle school concept. These teachers were in an old building designed for another era and concept in public schooling. Suddenly, teachers who had been trying to shape an old high school into a middle school environment had the chance to design and plan a brand-new middle school.

> *The staff of Stewart worked amazingly well together, incorporating interdisciplinary units throughout a variety of subject areas before that became an issue and/or mandate. Although it took a little time, I feel that there is still a lot of that cooperation and willingness to work together at TMS.*

At the same time, Marshall Elementary School was a happy band of sixth-grade teachers with the building to themselves; these teachers were very close because of their isolation.

> *Marshall Elementary School was devoted only to sixth-grade students for eight years. It sat outside the city limits south of Oxford on Rt. 27. The teachers in this building were the beneficiaries of the isolation. They came together following consolidation. They came to respect each other, work together, and I suspect almost love each other. They are as close today as TMS as they were when they were at Marshall Elementary.*

Creating a Middle School

When TMS opened, it was staffed with teachers from several area schools, but primarily Stewart Junior High School and Marshall Elementary. These teachers brought with them the vision and close working relationships that are important components to the success of the school. They were also heavily involved in the planning of the middle school, not only of instruction but of the building itself.

> *Special committees were in place for the creation of the "new" TMS. The committees made many visitations to other middle schools after the bond issue was passed to build TMS. Committees of teachers (grades six to eight) toured middle schools, spent the day and spoke with the various teachers about their programs and their physical building. We needed to find out what a middle school "felt" like. In addition, many teachers had direct input into the design and creation of our new building — from the placement of classrooms to the color the chalkboards. The tribe, rather team, concept was greatly explored and then implemented. Many meetings were held!*

> *The teachers were involved at every phase of the planning. They chose the carpet, furniture, and had a say in what went into the rooms they personally would be teaching in. This level of involvement produced a great deal of ownership and commitment.* – A Teacher

To be so heavily involved in the design of the building created the opportunity to have structural form follow instructional function. If tribe teachers need to meet as a team once a day, then two things had to happen: The building schedule needed to permit it, and there needed to be a convenient place to meet.

> *We worked as a team in making all decisions that would impact the facility, as well as the curriculum, . . . building plans, blueprints for TMS, and the like. I think these influenced both the physical facility and the program offered.* – A Teacher

When you enter the TMS building from the front, you are looking down a hallway that is the "spinal column" of traffic low. On the left-hand side of this central hallway are the three grade-level wings. One wing is dedicated to each of the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade levels. The wings share similarities. Classrooms number between 11 and 12 in each. There is a study hall in each wing and a tribe conference room. Each hall has student bathrooms. The sixth-grade wing is the first one you pass. The media center signals the location of the seventh-grade wing. The media center is in the center and is surrounded by classrooms dedicated to individualized instruction, learning disability and multiple handicapped instructors, and the computer center (site of the first Internet drop at TMS in 1991). On the right-hand side of the central hallway is the auditeria (where the students congregate between bus

release and homeroom) and the administrative office complex including counselors. The music, band, and chorus rooms are farther back on the right-hand side. Art, OWA, clothing labs, health, home economics, food lab, drafting room, and industrial technologies are grouped toward the back of the building. The gym, boys and girls locker rooms, and kitchen are on the far right side of the building as you go in. The halls are too narrow for the number of students and teachers that use them when the bell rings. Installation of SchoolNet wiring was the least complicated at TMS because of the suspended ceilings. The school is well kept and manicured. TMS is the only air-conditioned building in the school district. It is clean, attractive, and well designed, save the width of the halls. It works.

The building known as Talawanda Middle School was built because of local forces. The shape it took, however, was due to the vision of professional educators. We have looked at the building phase and have touched on the vision of a new way of teaching in the middle school concept. In the next chapter, we explore the larger context of educational transformation and how it shaped TMS.

Chapter Three

The Context for Transformation

TMS has evolved within a larger context of eight identifiable initiatives. These eight initiatives include (1) the early faculty and administrative energy for the middle school concept (vision building); (2) the Ohio Department of Education's commitment to school reform (Classroom of the Future); (3) the development of a successful partnership with Miami University (Partners in Learning); (4) Ohio legislative action to fund innovation (Venture Capital grants); (5) community consensus on district goals (the Talawanda City School District Strategic Plan); (6) Governor George Voinovich's championing of desktop Internet access for teachers (SchoolNet); (7) federal funding targeting middle schools with demonstrated capacity for change (Raising the Bar); and (8) creative professional development (teacher leadership). Each of these initiatives has fueled TMS' development into a transformative culture. What is significant to this case is how each component actively supported the other in related goals and action plans. In 1998-99, TMS continues to use Raising the Bar funding to advance their original learner-centered, middle school vision conceived in the early 1980s.

In this chapter, we will discuss the first seven of these initiatives; the eighth — professional-development — is reserved for the next chapter.

Creating the Talawanda Middle School Vision

Certainly the single biggest event was the very act of creation of TMS. The staff spent a tremendous amount of time learning about middle school philosophy and programs, and we had the chance to invent and reinvent our own systems and curricula, in what was at that time a very rare example of site-based decision making. I am proud of what we were able to accomplish and the fact that we came together from two separate buildings to form a unified staff. We have maintained and reinforced that unity through our collaborative committee work which has forged a common vision and mission statement for TMS. – Former associate superintendent

The vision for TMS began where all visions begin: It began in the minds of professional educators driven by the need to construct an appropriate learning experience for a developmentally unique set of learners. Preadolescence is an elusive developmental stage of physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth. The vision has to start with the learner to be served. This seems also to be where the commitment started. Well before there was any hope or promise of a new Talawanda Middle School, prior experience with many of the middle school concepts was being developed at Stewart Junior High School.

> *Twenty-two or more years ago, Ray Kley [c. 1976] led the staff to experiment with many of the programs and philosophies which became key to the middle school. To a great extent, Stewart, under Ray Kley, was one of the first middle schools. Ray pushed hard for intramural over interscholastic sports. We had an advisory for several years; we experimented with an activity period; we were child oriented; after a summer, staff-wide workshop we were on the verge of interdisciplinary teams.* – Former associate superintendent

The initiatives that helped shape the TMS vision were high-impact events on faculty and administrators. In the retelling, these events emerge as moments of institutional and personal bonding that continues to this day. In 1987, when it became obvious that the district was going to seek funding for a new middle school, faculty committees were formed based on interest.

> *When the staff at Stewart realized that we would be moving to a brand new facility, we were incredibly excited. We began studying the middle school concept (which I now believe was also our focus even when we called ourselves a junior high) by reading articles and hearing from university professors who specialized in this area. We divided ourselves into committees based on personal interest. I think mine was on middle school concept. . . . We felt we had ownership over what we were to become.*

> *Laying a solid middle school philosophy in the development of TMS was a primary contributing factor. We worked on teams before TMS was built to create an environment of cooperation and communication between Stewart and Marshall [Elementary]. We researched middle school philosophy and looked at schools where it worked. Building upon this foundation, we have a staff that is open to new ideas and willing to try them.*

There was purposeful study and inquiry in workshops, seminars, and individual readings.

> *We were given folders, articles, and A Guide to an Effective Middle School (Georgiady, et.al., 1984) to read [by] our administrators in preparation for the move.*

There were "happy bus rides" to other middle schools.

> *The bus trips were good talking time and good bonding time — this was not a nice bus. We got subs for the teachers — and from this we started to write the mission statement,*

beginning with the committee from Marshall and Stewart that traveled through the countryside visiting middle schools, and then meeting . . . to reach consensus on common philosophy and programs.

Finally, an Oxford College retreat was mentioned by many faculty.

I remember one session at the Oxford College Ballroom in which we were in groups with the Marshall staff and discussed various middle school themes, such as the advisor/advisee program. Would it be good to mix sixth [grade] with seventh and eighth, etc.? Also a very big moment for me would be the All Staff meeting at Oxford College, where we reached a staff-wide "buy in."

These events remain rich in the institutional memory of TMS teacher-leaders. The institutional culture present at Marshall Elementary and Stewart Junior High School has been sustained by a core group of caring and committed teacher-leaders who were at the center of the early experimentation with child-centered curricula and programs. These same 10 to 15 teachers retain influence at TMS. This is very significant to the change process. The original Stewart and Marshall School dreamers are still at TMS 12 years later. In many organizations, the dreamers move on when reality overtakes them. At TMS, the dreamers seem to continue to shape reality.

I was always proud to teach at Stewart during that period and felt we were on the cutting edge. This probably allowed for built-in support when, in more recent times, the [middle school] philosophy was revisited.

As TMS teachers look to the future, their learner-centered commitment appears to be intact. TMS faculty provides evidence of full engagement in the structure of its discipline program, school-to-work initiatives, out-of-school interactions, and extracurricular commitments. They continue to place a very high priority on the preadolescent learner as they envision the future. This shows up in the current dialogues on improving technology to improve instruction and block scheduling.

I think one of the main issues facing us is the change we have seen in the learner. We will have to make changes in our programs to accommodate single-parent children, empty houses to which students return, children needing more lasting relationships with adults, and children needing less change in their lives, rather than more. Additionally, I think it is increasingly important to show students how what they are learning will apply in their lives.

I would like to see more programs, like the Outdoors Club, that attempted to find ways to bring students with varying interests together and give them a sense of identity at the middle school. Students who are not interested in or do not make it onto the various athletic groups, student council, newspaper, yearbook, etc., need an avenue for becoming involved in their school.

. . . The more we can meet with students in a non-classroom setting the better the situation is in the classroom. This would include some coaching positions and some activities in which the group is small enough that you can get to know your kids. We need to include as much of this as possible in our school.

Ohio's Classroom of the Future Project

In 1986, David McWilliams was the assistant superintendent for the Talawanda City Schools. David had been in the district since 1985. David and teachers from Stewart agreed to be part of a consortium of school districts organized by the Butler County Joint Vocational School that would participate in Ohio's 1986 Classroom of the Future project. While no funds were available for school changes, the project committed to establishing a set of principles that would define Ohio's school reform agenda in the information age.

It seemed like a great opportunity at the time. We had a group of energetic and creative teachers at Stewart and Marshall who were very interested in the middle school concept. The state project did not have much money attached to it, but Miami University was involved and our teachers were ready for something like this. In retrospect, the seven principles that evolved from the Ohio Classroom of the Future project, combined with the basic tenets of the middle school movement, gave our teachers a great foundation to plan what would become Talawanda Middle School. – David McWilliams

The Ohio Classroom of the Future project was the first in Ohio Department of Education-sponsored projects to examine the implications of emerging technologies on the structure of classrooms, schools, and learning. The School of Education and Allied Professions at Miami University was one of four Ohio universities associated with the Classroom of the Future project. Douglas Brooks, then chair of the Department of Teacher Education, was asked to author Miami's proposal.

Dave McWilliams and I came to Oxford at the same time. Relationships between Miami and Talawanda were strained at the time. Our McGuffey Lab School closed in 1984 and we flooded their schools with students. The Classroom of the Future Grant looked like a chance for us to work together. I experienced an epiphany of sorts at one of the first Columbus gatherings of project participants. The speaker forecasted the emergence and power of computer networks. I had a faculty member who was interested in computers [who] mentored me into the information age. This combination of vision sharing and mentoring turned me on to network building. First, it was EDTNet. Then is was TLCNet, the Talawanda Learning Community Network, and eventually SchoolNet. This project is where Talawanda Middle School, Miami University, and networking came together. None of us has been the same since. – Douglas Brooks

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The Ohio Classroom of the Future project produced the following seven principles that served as the foundation for the grant: (The italics are added to highlight the connection between current initiatives at TMS and the objectives of the original seven principles of Ohio's Classroom of the Future project 12 years before.)

1. **Enabling Teaching Teams**
   - This commitment includes teaching students over an extended period of time *(block scheduling)* and providing a sense of family *("tribes" structure)*.
2. **Focus on Curriculum**
   - Develop the modes of communication at the primary level *(SchoolNet)*.
   - Address the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful living and constructive citizenship during the middle years *(mediation program)*.
   - Prepare students for work and lifelong learning at the secondary level *(School to Work)*.
3. **Strengthen Professional Development**
   - This commitment includes dialogue about classroom practice *(tribe meetings)*, useful feedback, planning, designing, studying, and evaluating curriculum *(Wednesday early release day, teacher-led professional development, Playshops)*.
   - Learn about new methods and ideas together *(Venture Capital-supported professional development, Strategic Planning, SchoolNet Playshops)*.
   - Embed staff development as a natural event *(SchoolNet)*.
4. **Ensure Continuous Progress Through Intelligent Planning**
   - Share instruction and responsibilities through collaborative work and make proactive decisions about change (Principal's Advisory Committee [PAC], Venture Capital Committee, Tribes, SchoolNet).
5. **Use of Technology to Increase Learning Outcomes**
   - Personalize the management of instruction and expand human capacity by teaching for understanding *(cooperative methods, student-based authentic work, integrated curriculum, technology-rich classrooms)*.

6. **Individualize Instruction to Meet Special Needs**
   - Know the student.
   - Group students on a multi-age basis and assure continuous progress *(Intervention program, 1-2-1).*

7. **Mastery Learning vs. Time Variable as Constant**
   - Maximize student potential and increase learning *(proficiency tests).*
   - Enlist families as partners and engage them in efforts to improve the quality of instruction *(SchoolNet outreach to parents with Raising the Bar funds).*

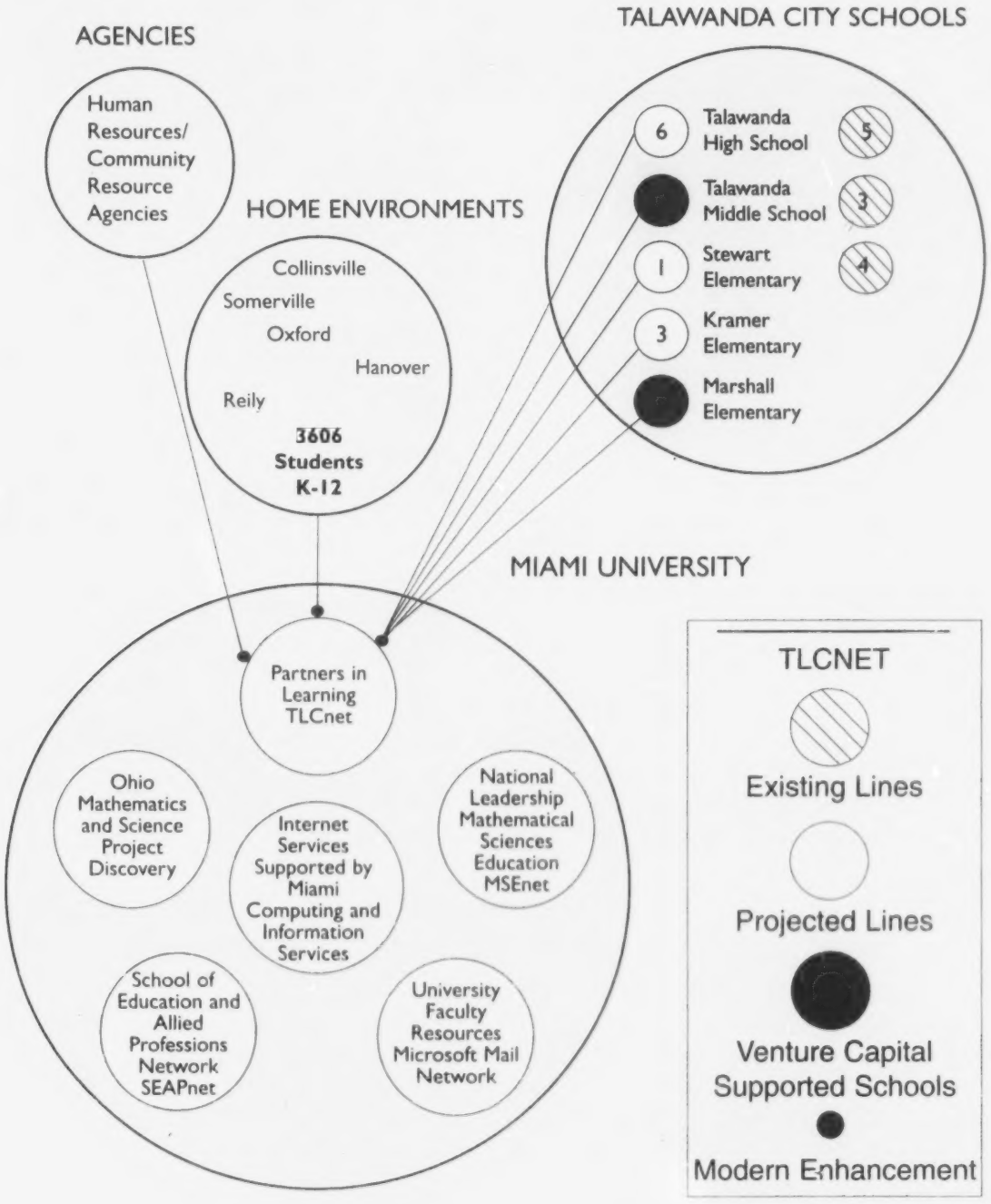
The seven principles of Ohio's Classroom of the Future project lacked only two things to insure serious implementation in the information age. These two things began to emerge five years later with the explosion in growth of the computer network technology and Internet-ready computers. The goals and objectives of every subsequent grant at TMS can be traced to the seven principles of Ohio's Classroom of the Future project. The TMS case is largely a story of focus.

Partners in Learning

In 1991, Partners in Learning was organized by a community-wide technology leadership team that included the Talawanda City School District, Tri-Village Local School District (Darke County), Miami University, the Oxford Chamber of Commerce, Apple Inc., Warner Cable, Ace Hardware, and GTE. Since 1991, the goal of Partners in Learning has been to design and implement a prototype learning community that would guide Ohio schools, communities, and universities into the twenty-first century. Between 1991 and 1994, the Partners in Learning consortium successfully experimented with technology prototypes using audiotapes, videotapes, and the development of a community Freenet environment called the Talawanda Learning Community Network, or TLCNet (Figure 1). TLCNet provided Internet access from selected classrooms in Stewart and the computer laboratory at TMS. Administrators and teacher leaders at Stewart Elementary and Talawanda Middle School had taken the initiative to fund and experiment with classroom Internet access and teacher connectivity with parents.

> *The teachers who were interested in the Internet and its implications for teaching and learning were starting to surface at Stewart. Miami University was providing the server. All we had to do was figure out how to fund monthly costs and installation of the lines. GTE did the installation for free. We wrote some small grants and pursued support from companies in town like McDonald's and Ace Hardware that were very interested in technology and our schools. Miami professors had students and their own kids in some of the classrooms. We had several teachers willing to try anything.* – Current principal

Figure 1 **TALAWANDA LEARNING COMMUNITY NETWORK**



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We had a champion for Internet access in our director of the computer lab at TMS. [He] was always looking for ways to expand the number of phone lines we had in the lab. The kids loved to use the Internet. – Former principal

Simultaneous institutional planning for technology in the Talawanda City Schools and Miami University created concurrent capacity for change. Long-range technology plans were being developed by all project participants — Talawanda City Schools, Tri-Village Local Schools, Miami University, and the City of Oxford. In 1991, the Talawanda City Schools and the Tri-Village Local Schools initiated technology assessments, comprehensive building and district-wide strategic planning. Each school district had coordinated building-level and district-wide technology committees charged with continually improving the impact of technology on teaching and learning. Partners in Learning provided grant writing, technical, and professional-development support to the Talawanda City Schools and Tri-Village Local Schools within the School of Education and Allied Profession's (SEAP) mission to stimulate the simultaneous renewal of schools and universities. Partners in Learning was identified as the SEAP Partnership Technology prototype in 1995 and an Apple Demonstration Partnership project in 1997.

Ohio's Venture Capital Grant Program

The 1992 Venture Capital Grant opportunity matured at Talawanda Middle School in a fashion typical of the culture of the school. The opportunity was recognized quickly by the administration and teacher leaders. The request for proposal made its way to the principal. Recognizing an opportunity, Phil Cagwin, TMS's second building principal, took it to the building teacher-leadership team. They discussed it and decided they would compete for the funding. Administrative support combined with teacher-leader interest. Consensus was reached. Action was taken. The principal organized a team of volunteer teacher-leaders who met with Miami University's Douglas Brooks. The principal arranged for substitutes and developed a timeline for authoring the proposal text. Individuals and teams would author parts of the proposal that would be in rough-draft form by October 8. The draft would be reviewed and circulated throughout the building for feedback. The feedback would be integrated into the proposal, signatures would be collected, and the grant would be delivered on October 26, 1992, to the Ohio Department of Education. In a series of meetings, the teachers and administrators fleshed out the Talawanda Middle School Professional Development Model (Figure 2).

"Our teachers were short on resources for professional development. They were in a new building. They had opened the building masterfully. They were professionals and needed to be engaged at the national level. We needed to have what we had been doing confirmed. We needed resources to fuel our vision. The district opened the building, but there was no money for professional development."

Figure 2

TALAWANDA MIDDLE SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

TARGET

FOCUS	Interdisciplinary Commitment	Community Involvement	Identified Learners	At Risk Learners	Program Enrichment
TRIBES	$9,000 Integrate extended basics Flexible scheduling Prof. development Student intervention	$2,500 Intervention resources Miami University Adopt-a-School Field trips Classroom speakers	$6,000 Implementation Inclusion program Inservice training	$3,500 Proactive discipline Intervention Incentives Inservice training	$4,000 Field trips Professional development New course development
TECHNOLOGY	$40,250 Local Area Network (LAN) actup Comp. maintenance Inservice training Capital improvement	$4,000 TLCnet Community training Homework via TLC Staffing labs	$4,000 LAN-access to class resources Modified Instruction	$4,000 TLCnet Family Res. LAN-access to class resources Career exploration via Internet	$4,000 Comp. Literacy Course of Study Inservice training Loan program for technology Career exploration
SITE-BASED DECISION MAKING (SBDM)	$21,500 Inservice training Tribe planning time SBDM Team & committee release	$2,250 Talawanda 2000 Initiatives Parent Teacher Group projects SBDM Team & committee release	$8,000 Special Services planning time SBDM Team & committee release	$8,000 SBDM Team & committee release	$4,000 New course development planning time Grant writing SBDM Team & committee release

SEVEN PRINCIPLES			
ENABLING TEACHING TEAMS	**FOCUS THE CURRICULUM**	**STRENGTHEN STAFF DEVELOPMENT**	**ENSURE PROGRESS THROUGH PLANNING**
USE TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE LEARNING OUTCOMES	**INDIVIDUALIZE INSTRUCTION TO MEET SPECIAL NEEDS**	**MASTERY LEARNING VS. THE VARIABLE AS CONSTANT**	

The three focuses in the TMS Professional Development Model were (1) "tribes," (2) technology, and (3) site-based decision making. The five targets were (1) interdisciplinary commitment, (2) community involvement, (3) identified learners, (4) at-risk learners, and (5) program enrichment. The model included a list of initiatives that required funding and estimated costs. The funding totaled $125,000 over five years. In March 1994, Talawanda Middle School was selected as one of 180 out of 800 schools across Ohio to receive funding in the first round of Ohio's Venture Capital Program. Talawanda City Schools received two Venture Capital Grants in 1993 totaling $250,000 over five years. One grant was to TMS and the other to Maude Marshall Elementary School. Both grants included expanded involvement in computer networking via TLCNet and related professional development. TMS faculty members now had $125,000 over five years for professional development and infrastructure design. Funded trips to professional meetings would reveal to them that their vision was solid and create increased opportunities for new faculty leadership at TMS.

The Talawanda City Schools Strategic Plan

In 1993, the Talawanda City Schools instituted a community-wide Talawanda 2000 Strategic Planning Task Force. Community input was solicited in a series of evening meetings held throughout the district. The Core Planning Committee, with the assistance of 60 citizens who participated in the effort as members of action teams, developed and refined the strategies that were submitted to the board. Predictably, TMS faculty played an active role in the strategic planning process.

> *The strategic plan was evidence of a community commitment to technology-supported, high-quality programs and instruction. It made it that much easier to apply for external funding with the district planning already in place. The grant readers had to notice this. When the SchoolNet prototype opportunity came along in November of 1994, the Venture Capital Grant networking goals of the TMS and Marshall Elementary fit right into the SchoolNet project. TMS has been the full beneficiary of the district's technology agenda. The teachers have continued to give evidence of their interest in leadership. Their successful Raising the Bar grant is the most recent example.* – District administrator

In December 1995, the Talawanda Board of Education unanimously approved the 97 action plans designed to facilitate 22 strategies developed by a 30-member Core Planning Committee. The five major areas of the plan included:

Communications

- Create and maintain a proactive plan to communicate with our local, state, and federal government officials in order to influence government officials to the benefit of the Talawanda School District.

- Develop and implement a continuous communication and information program to better inform all internal and external publics about the school district. *(SchoolNet)*

Funding, Facilities, and Fiscal Management

- Explore additional funding sources to help meet current and long-range needs. *(SchoolNet, SchoolNet Plus, Schools on the Move, School to Work, Raising the Bar, Telecommunity)*
- Ensure that district expenditures do not exceed district revenue and develop strategies to avoid going into the state loan fund.
- Develop a maintenance program to maintain the physical facilities of the school district.

School and Community

- Make Talawanda City Schools more accessible and friendly to the general public.
- Develop and implement an information program to stress the importance of parent/family responsibility. *(Channel 17)*
- Re-establish and strengthen to coordinate the involvement of business and Miami University and community volunteers with the schools. *(Partners in Learning)*

Program and Instruction

- Increase the awareness and appreciation of diversity in our multicultural world.
- Further develop life skills to include the family preparation needs of all students.
- Develop and implement unified curricula (including extracurricular and co-curricular activities) that capitalize on the talents and meet the needs of all students.
- Focus instruction and intervention activities on preparing students to pass proficiency exams and to meet graduation requirements.
- Implement a variety of teaching methods and styles to better meet the individual needs of students.
- Develop district-wide strategies to increase student self-esteem.
- Implement a discipline policy that holds parents and students accountable for student actions.
- Develop a program to use technology in the classroom management and instruction across the school district. *(SchoolNet, SchoolNet Plus, Schools on the Move, Telecommunity, Raising the Bar)*

Professional Development

- Improve the working relationship among all school personnel to enhance credibility and to enforce job accountability.

- Support and encourage the development of the creative talents and skills of the staff. *(Playshops, SchoolNet)*
- Promote research and development opportunities for staff and programs that support the mission. *(Playshops, SchoolNet)*

In the fall 1997, the Talawanda School Board asked a district study group to prioritize the individual objectives of the approved strategic plan. This study group took into account emerging state of Ohio curricular mandates, grants, and legislation to optimize the impact of the plan. Quality programs and instruction were determined to be the primary focus of the plan. Funding and fiscal management was considered the foundation that supported unilateral attention to facilities, professional development, communications, and school and community. SchoolNet technology was viewed as the infrastructure tool that would most enhance collaboration and communication.

The Talawanda City School District Strategic Plan process has been referenced in every Talawanda and TMS grant application submitted since its adoption. This document has helped to create the organizational rationale for school board decisions that have impacted TMS. Teacher leaders and administrators at TMS were able to influence the content of the strategic plan. Their active involvement in the process and their combined experimental experience with many of the recommendations provided direction and substance to the document.

> *"TMS faculty have experimented with many of the program and instruction goals of the plan. They have been leaders in the application of cooperative instructional methods, integrated curriculum design, teaching teams, and applications of technology to instruction. It is easy to support initiatives that fit inside the district's strategic plan when you know that the teachers who put them there are asking for the support."*

Commitment to school improvement has been longitudinal, broad based and comprehensive in the Talawanda City Schools. Talawanda Middle School faculty skillfully positioned itself for external funding inside its own vision, partnerships, the district strategic plan, and the state agenda for school reform.

Ohio's SchoolNet Program

In early October 1994, the Talawanda Board of Education created and staffed a director of technology position. In November 1994, the Ohio Department of Education announced a grant competition to become one of 14 SchoolNet prototypes in the state of Ohio. The objective of the funding was to provide prototype leadership for a networking project that would fund an Internet drop on the desktop of every teacher in the state of Ohio. Funded by $95 million, the grant promised financial support for the purchase and installation of network wiring to the desktop of every teacher in Ohio. The

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Talawanda City Schools' and Tri-Village Local Schools' boards of education approved the development and submission of the Partners in Learning/SchoolNet proposal in conjunction with Partners in Learning at Miami University. The Talawanda City Schools, and TMS in particular, were positioned to be very competitive for SchoolNet prototype status. Curiosity and the climate of partnership were fueling this effort. TMS commitment to TLCNet had given them valuable experience. TMS faculty had yet another opportunity to advance its vision.

The Partners in Learning/SchoolNet proposal offered a powerful example of how connectivity and integrated technologies might enhance community-wide teaching and learning. The broad goal of systemic changes in student learning, behavior, and the learning community would be achieved through differentiated technological applications. Specific SchoolNet project goals included the following:

1. Increase the quantity and quality of student and parent engagement in the school curriculum.
2. Create opportunities for students to do meaningful work, thinking, and writing.
3. Dissolve the culture of isolationism that has kept teachers seeking innovations distanced from innovative teachers, and caring teachers away from the critical influence, help, and support of willing parents.
4. Increase comfort with the tools of the Information Age.
5. Have access to high-level and high-interest courses via distance learning.
6. Be proficient at accessing, evaluating, and communicating information.
7. Be globally aware and able to use outside resources.
8. Solve complex problems through the application of technologies.
9. Nurture artistic expression in students and graduates.
10. Increase school productivity and efficiency through systemic change associated with connectivity.
11. On-line access to teacher professional development.

The Partners in Learning/SchoolNet prototype proceeded in five phases to achieve the following five goals:

1. Infrastructure installation and testing of the SchoolNet/Partners in Learning network
2. Training of workstation participants including teachers, learners, parents, administrators, and members of the community to enhance teaching and learning
3. Professional development to address existing instructional needs and applications within specific grade levels

4. Professional development support to address efforts at integration of SchoolNet into instructional planning, parent connectivity, and inter-district innovations

5. Continuous dissemination via SchoolNet, TLCNet, and Ohio Education Computer Network (OECN) systems of project processes, adaptations, changes, and problems

The summative goal of the Partners in Learning/SchoolNet project was to develop a prototype for systems-based reform supported by an embedded telecommunications infrastructure. The emergent community would be characterized by connectedness between local and distanced pre-professional and professional educators, primary caregivers, related human service agencies, and other educational resources available via SchoolNet. The Talawanda School Board authorized a SchoolNet funding plan of $350,579 that included a local board allocation of $212,199. Fifteen thousand dollars came from the TMS Venture Capital Grant and contributed to the $57,863 cost of installation at TMS. Installation began in November 1995 and was completed in June 1996. The goals of Ohio's Classroom of the Future had been advanced first by the TMS Venture Capital Grant; now, the goals of Classroom of the Future and Venture Capital were being advanced by Partners in Learning/SchoolNet.

TMS was quick to meet expectations established under the original Talawanda District Technology Plan and SchoolNet vision. TMS had the highest percentage of teachers representing their building at noncompulsory summer 1996 and 1997 SchoolNet professional-development Playshops. They were the first school to develop a schoolwide and common FirstClass Client *desktop* that included committee conferences and electronic mail and system assistance. All teachers have one networked computer in their classroom and use the SchoolNet infrastructure for communication and collaboration.

Many staff have begun to use multiple computers in their lesson plans by sharing computers between classrooms when the need arises. This integration of technology has allowed increased student participation using technology during the learning process. Interdisciplinary learning is taking place using the SchoolNet technology infrastructure for support. All staff have used Internet resources in enriching their curriculum. These activities continue today with the support of Raising the Bar funding.

Ohio's Raising the Bar Program

The Ohio Raising the Bar funds are 1997 federal Technology Leadership Challenge Funds (TLCF) passed through to the states for distribution to schools with the potential for demonstration site status. The Ohio TLCF Request for Proposal (RFP) reached Talawanda during the last weeks of the 1997 academic year. The prospect of $375,000 over two years proved very attractive. Even though the year was ending, a team of teachers, district administrators, and university personnel met to examine the RFP. The group reconvened after an analysis of the RFP had been done. The writing team elected to con-

tinue to use the language and goals of the original Venture Capital Grant and the Partners in Learning/ SchoolNet Grant to advance their vision of *Raising the Bar*. This enriched vision included moving toward block scheduling, advancing the speed of network access, increasing the availability of computers in the classroom, focused professional development, and continued collaboration.

Raising the Bar funding advanced the following nine broad goals:

1. Opportunities for students to do meaningful work, thinking, and writing.
2. Graduates proficient at accessing, evaluating, and communicating information.
3. Graduates able to solve complex problems through the application of technologies.
4. Learners comfortable with the tools of the Information Age.
5. Artistic expression nurtured in students and graduates.
6. Increased quantity and quality of student and parent engagement in the school curriculum.
7. Increased school productivity and efficiency through systemic change associated with connectivity.
8. Teachers and students engaged in collaborative learning projects across grade levels and across districts.
9. Improved state proficiency tests scores and 75 percent passage rate on the sixth- and ninth-grade exams on the first attempt.

Raising the Bar has advanced the process of developing technology-rich learning in grades six to eight. The goals of previous grants were complemented by the goals of the Raising the Bar initiative. Raising the Bar complemented the original SchoolNet vision in the following ways:

1. Help Talawanda City Schools achieve explicit SchoolNet goals.
2. Facilitate application of the Partners in Learning/SchoolNet Teacher-Leader Professional Development Model.
3. Enhance within-district telecommunications with SchoolNet.
4. Permit teacher sharing of curricular resources for grades six to eight.
5. The grades six to eight curriculum would be accessible to other stakeholders.

In the summer of 1998, TMS faculty designed and implemented two weeks of professional development between June 15 and June 29 to advance the goals of Raising the Bar. Predictably, TMS teacher and administrative participation was almost 100 percent. Teacher leaders were compensated to offer sessions on web page development, telecommunity, hyperstudio, QuickTake, QuickCam, and scanner

applications. The two weeks were characterized by a focus on authentic tasks that the teachers brought to the sessions, practice time for skill development, and on-line access to an accumulated resource file on student-centered learning. Embedded in the two weeks was the requirement to develop and submit an Ohio SchoolNet LessonLab. This LessonLab featured the integration of technology into an activity to enhance learner performance.

> *The Raising the Bar two weeks was designed like the Playshops we had participated in the last two summers. We knew the goals. We mentored each other and shared our skills. There was a lot of time for discovery and practice. We set ourselves up so we could be together in skill sessions in pairs and then work in our own rooms with our own computers and materials. Of course, the whole two weeks was managed on SchoolNet so we were in constant contact with each other. We came to school, and the first thing we did was check our e-mail and Raising the Bar conference folder on SchoolNet.* – A Teacher

The Raising the Bar proposal for TMS continues the transformative process begun with district initiatives, including Ohio's Classroom of the Future Grant, community-wide strategic planning, the 1993 Venture Capital Grant, Partners in Learning/SchoolNet in 1995, SchoolNet Plus grants and the School to Work systems-building grant in 1997. Systemic change has emerged as the goal that is attainable with the proper combination of these resources. Raising the Bar was envisioned to accelerate Talawanda Middle School's efforts to transform the structure of its educational system and assist students and faculty in continued individual improvement. TMS faculty has continued to be particularly innovative and productive in pursuit of the SchoolNet goals of deploying technology and providing professional development. This is especially evident in the access educators have to each other by electronic mail and to the Internet for curriculum planning and implementation.

Chapter Four

Critical Components: Professionalism and Leadership

The words "professional," "professionalism," and "professionally" come up a lot in conversations with faculty at Talawanda Middle School. These words are part of the language culture of the place, and they refer to several aspects of life at TMS: professional development and the inquiry process that sets the stage for continual development; the collegiality and collaboration among faculty members to make TMS effective; and overall teacher and administrative leadership. This chapter will look at avenues of professional development at TMS, the vision of teachers for their school, and the role of leadership in the evolution of the new middle school.

Professional Development: Venture Capital

Venture made it possible to study ways of instructing students. We looked at thematic instruction, interdisciplinary units of study, and something like 'gentle' discipline. We invited several outside people to come in to speak to us. Having the whole staff involved has really made us move in the same direction, and has made us able to all speak the "same language." Venture made it possible to move ahead technologically. This is a wonderful improvement in the quality of instruction. It is also important for our students to be familiar with new technology to stay competitive in the world today. Venture also made it possible for staff to go to professional meetings, to see other teacher's successful ideas, and also to share our successful ideas with others. I can only see positive things come out of this. Teachers need time to reflect and regroup, which this does so well. I personally feel that the quality of my instruction has been impacted greatly by the opportunities presented with Venture money.

I truly feel a sense of professionalism throughout the building which I believe was sorely missing prior to Venture Capital. I have the information and the tools to make an impact on my students and my working environment. I have the confidence to work toward shap-

ing solutions to curricular concerns, and I also have the professional respect and trust of my colleagues to take a more active role in the building. – A Teacher

The Venture Capital Grant has given us money for the staff to implement many changes. I think that the incorporation of technology has impacted on the way we run our daily business. With other additional monies, some teachers have purchased enough equipment for students to have hands-on experiences with technology. Many of our staff have taken professional leave, either for a middle school or subject area conference. This brings new ideas back to the staff. We take pride in sharing what is going on. – A Teacher

The greatest way is that there has been money available for teachers to attend professional meetings where ideas are found and implemented in the classroom. Also, [Venture Capital] has enabled us to improve technology, which has ultimately benefited students in the classroom. As my knowledge grows, I use more and more technology in the classroom, such as CD roms, the Internet, et cetera. – A Teacher

Venture Capital enabled the faculty of TMS to put their visions into practice. The opportunity for professional leaves to attend national and state conferences was fully stimulated by Venture Capital funding. These opportunities set the stage for a surge of professional development and increased curiosity. The ideas of the teachers quoted in this section have a better than average chance of becoming integrated into the behaviors of the many as a result.

I believe our network technology frees a lot of time for other tasks, as well as encouraging educational research on the Web. I have been able to acquire quite a bit of technological knowledge; I am much more computer literate; I am cognizant of more teaching techniques, and use some of them in the classroom.

I personally never feel 'out of it' with no one to ask. Also the relationship between the extracurricular activity coaches, etc., and the parents is unique. It is usually one of respect and professionalism from both ends. I think this sets a good example for students.

It is difficult to single out specific events or assignments that have impacted the evolution of TMS. It is a merging of university classes, journal readings, small group discussions, daily interactions with students, parents, and colleagues; as well as committee assignments that impact this evolution.

The Venture Capital Grant has caused every staff member to become actively involved in the school and with the students. Action committees were formed and many concerns were reviewed and met with solutions or studies. Teachers have computers in the classroom to use with students. They have been educated through professional opportunities. An effort has been made to reinforce positive behavior in students which should lead to higher achievement.

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> *Professionally I have been able to increase my knowledge of computers. I have researched ways to use technology in the classroom. I have been able to take advantage of professional enrichment, attending workshops, visiting other schools, becoming encouraged about the future programs available and possible use in our middle school.*

Professional development at TMS extends to the environment in which preservice teachers are socialized. The Integrated Systems Model for Professional Development guides the events that occur during student teaching at TMS (Figure 3). Students apply to serve as senior interns at TMS (Figure 4). They register on FirstClass Client electronic messaging system and have access to the TMS SchoolNet desktop.

An Integrated Systems Model for Preservice Teacher Supervision

SUPERVISION COMPONENT

Preservice Teacher Observation

- Site-Based Support
- Video-Based Reflection

Telecommunity Development

- Telecommunities of Interns, Mentors & University Faculty
- Intra- and Interdistrict Telecommunities

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT

Technology-Enhanced Curriculum and Instruction

- Pre- and Inservice Teacher Pedagogical Skill Development

Multimedia Portfolio Development and Publishing

- Video
- World Wide Web

School/University/Network/Contexts

ONLINE RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING COMPONENT

Focuses On

- Effectiveness of this Model
- Adoption of Innovations
- Pre- and Inservice Teacher Concerns

Uses Telecommunities and the World Wide Web

- Multimedia-Based
- Interactive

Source: J. Kevin Maney, Bruce E. Perry, and Douglas M. Brooks, Department of Teacher Education, Miami University

Figure 3

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Figure 4

Special Student Teaching Opportunity in a Partner School

TALAWANDA CITY SCHOOLS

Talawanda High School
Talawanda Middle School
Stewart Intermediate School
Kramer Elementary School
Marshall Elementary School

Unique Characteristics

* Ohio Partners in Learning/"SchoolNet" Prototype
* "Partners in Learning" is the EAP Technology Partnership Prototype
* All teachers workstations networked to each other and the Internet
* "Senior Interns" given ID's and passwords to use district-wide computer network
* Telecommunity access to all "Talawanda Interns" Network conference
* Videotape reflections opportunities
* K-4 SchoolNet plus classrooms
* Schools on the Move Ohio "Lesson Lab" Project District
* TMS "Raising the Bar" Technology Grant
* Technology-enhanced student-teacher professional development
* Venture Capital Grant District
* Technology Mentor District in Project TEAM
* K-12 "Schools to Work" Career Education Project

Demographics

* All classrooms and buildings networked to each other and Miami University
* High-technology classrooms including scanners, VCRs and Channel One
* District Cable TV Channel 16
* Schools located in Oxford area

Collegiality and Collaboration

The comments of teachers continually make reference to the importance of collegiality and collaboration. This comes across particularly at the tribe and content-area gatherings.

> *I think the relationships between the teachers in tribes and outside is a large factor in the success of this building.*

> *The communication that I enjoy among the other language arts teachers keeps me abreast of new ideas and new professional books, and I am able to quickly ask for help or an idea.*

> *I think the old Stewart staff and the old Marshall staff each came to TMS with special bonds. However, now those old bonds are not as strong and new bonds between Tribe members have become strong. There are strong grade-level bonds now, too. Positive strong relationships have developed, as well, among committee members. For example, the old extra-curricular committee members sweated blood together in the year we worked together. The Behavior Management Committee worked very well as a group too. Those types of experiences helped to bring people together with a common purpose, and now we share common and rewarding experiences.*

Continuous Improvement and Integration

It takes energy to deconstruct organizational structures and reconstruct more functional ones. This restructuring is not for everyone. What seems to distinguish TMS from other schools is the belief in their own capacity to make something they commit to work effectively. I think this has its roots in the planning and implementation of the new Talawanda Middle School at roughly the same time that these teachers were involved in a union action. Their value as professionals was at the center of the strike. Yet, at the same time, they were being asked to anticipate the opening of a new middle school. The combination of these events forged these teachers. If character is forged on the anvil of adversity, the faculty of TMS had time to test its metal. Nothing seems to frighten them when they think together.

> *We must not rest on our laurels. We must continue to look for better ways to reach consensus on important issues such as block scheduling, intervention, and teaming.* – A Teacher

> *Teachers have been able to use Venture Capital monies to attend professional meetings. This enables teachers to realize that they are important in the continuing process of improving instruction. Teachers try out different approaches (especially with technology) to their subject matter, keeping what is of benefit and discarding the remainder.* – A Teacher

Finally, the traits expressed in the following teacher comments represent an enduring commitment to a good climate and risk taking. They create room to move and, more importantly, room to make a mistake. These quotes capture the spirit of professionalism at TMS.

I also think that our faculty is generally supportive if they can see that something is good for kids and for our school. At times we have been frustrated, but we have managed to survive.

Sometimes different committee groups have different views on various issues. That means not everyone always gets their way. In the long run, decisions are based on the facts given on the particular topic.

On the whole, the staff approaches things with a sense of humor and attitude of how can I make this work?

The enthusiasm and willingness to change in order to benefit the students have to be among the top factors in the success of the middle school.

We are team players, committed to a community spirit, desiring to work with parents and their child towards a successful and enjoyable educational experience, much like a positive extended family.

This is a problem-solving group, and once problems are identified, they act. By staying current professionally, staff members do anticipate events that will impact the school and do prevention instead of reaction management. They also take great pride in being proactive.

Many of the staff of TMS serve on district-level committees and as such bring building input to those events. We have become a very forthright and vocal staff in the district, not wishing to impose our will on other buildings, but providing leadership nonetheless.

Most people in this building focus on the positive and therefore don't concentrate on the negative comments that people might make about this school or staff. Staff members in this building are very good about keeping confidences and not repeating the negative.

We try to be as proactive as reasonably possible and develop programs to meet state mandates or standards before they are a reality.

Few decisions are accepted by everyone, but it is important that people feel that they have the means to express their opinions. I feel that this exists at TMS.

Many of us go way back. We became good friends early in our teaching careers at Stewart. There has not been a tremendous amount of mobility. Many of the staff at Stewart and at Marshall are veteran teachers who have grown up together in the profession, so to speak. I think that we have always had leadership in the administrative offices that has

encouraged camaraderie. We have never felt a 'we' or 'they'; I think we have always thought about ourselves as 'us.'

People go the extra mile and take the time to get together and plan fun events. We can also disagree, discuss our adversarial positions, and still be friends or at least respect a differing professional opinion. There seems to be a very little 'sweeping bad feelings under the rug' and letting them build and fester until they inevitably explode. People have honest and open discussions.

Teacher leadership and administrative leadership have been defining characteristics of the TMS transformative culture. The commitment and background of the TMS faculty and leadership is described in this section.

Teacher Leadership

I believe that our enthusiastic, professional, competent, and caring staff is the main reason for this school's success. Faculty members were involved extensively with the planning of this school and have been committed to moving forward ever since. – A Teacher

This comment seems to pretty well sum up the expressed relationship between faculty and capacity. We have already covered the professionalism and collegiality of the faculty at TMS. We have also how they were involved from the very beginning in the planning of the building and the vision of the school. They are responsible for its character. We want to mention also the commitment to student-centered learning that can be found in the professional backgrounds of the TMS faculty. Their commitments and talent are grounded in a vast array of experience at other grade levels and in other schools. These teachers are involved in the nonacademic lives of their students, and they value professional growth. These teachers are leaders.

There are many contributing factors to the success of TMS — the leadership and tireless efforts of individual teachers and administrators working toward our common goals; the committee structure which empowers staff development, research, and decision making; the district-supported inservice time which allows for professional development and curriculum planning. – A Teacher

The faculty at the middle school is a large contributing factor in its success. Our school is staffed with teachers who are willing to give until it hurts. They have participated in committees, attended workshops, advanced their education, and attended professional enrichment of all kinds. They are willing to give of their time and effort to see improvements made, to help write grants, to work after school on intervention with individuals or groups of stu-

> *dents. TMS has an abundance of people who care. They also care about each other. They care about each person personally, as well as a staff. They share ideas, feelings and support each other whenever it is needed. I have experienced this and I know it makes a difference.* – A Teacher

The teacher leadership at Talawanda Middle School comes from a wealth of interdisciplinary and multiple-grade-level experiences across a full range of career histories. This is a cooperative faculty because of the diversity of experiences it bring to the classroom, school, and district.

> *I think my exposure to the other levels of the educational process in our district gave me a lot of insight and understanding of the position that the middle school holds in that process and the value of that position.* – A Teacher

They vision, lead, cooperate, and mentor. In interviews, TMS teachers continually speak about the high quality of communications they enjoy with each other, the cooperative problem solving that is in place, and the deep respect they have for each other. "Professionalism" is a word you hear used a great deal. "We are professionals." "We treat each other like professionals." They have a wealth of experiences to bring to the vision they share for TMS.

The commitment to students as individuals is embedded in the training and professional experiences of a significant number of the faculty. Yet, they rarely speak of the prior grade-level experiences, other school experiences, or wide range of other school experiences that set the stage for common understandings and commitments. This has all become invisible against the bright lights of day-to-day activities and what lies ahead for TMS. To the interviewer, it feels like the unspoken confidence that fortifies a spirit for the unpredictable and the seizing of opportunities. Six of the TMS teachers have been presidents of the local teacher's union — more from TMS than any other school in the district.

> *Over everything else, it is having a tremendous, dedicated staff. I think our staff is the greatest strength — one factor includes the variety of experience of our staff. We have many members with a wealth of experience that have been involved in their own personal, professional improvement long before various grants. Many are leaders in their respective curricula and have mentored younger additions to the staff.* – A Teacher

In this case study, we suspected teacher leadership from the beginning. We did not expect to find the development relationship between the needs of the faculty and the skills of the different building principals. Timely administrative leadership is one of the subtle discoveries of the case study. To this issue we turn next.

Administrative Leadership

Talawanda Middle School appears to have had just the right administrators at just the right time. From the earliest stages of envisioning with Ray Kley at the former Stewart Junior High School in 1979, to the current leadership of Rhonda Bohannon, the personality and professional character of the administrators associated with TMS seem to have been just what faculty needed to ensure continued growth. It is possible to mark developmental stages in the transformation of TMS using the building principals as benchmarks.

There are six to eight members of the core group of teacher-leaders currently at TMS who go back to the Ray Kley years. Ray is remembered best for his willingness to "think outside the box" and for being ahead of his time on middle school development.

The Ray Kley Years: "Getting the Ideas"

> *"I also feel that I would be negligent if I didn't mention that 22 or more years ago Ray Kley led the staff to experiment with many of the programs and philosophies which became key to the middle school. To a great extent, Stewart under Ray Kley, was one of the first middle schools. Ray pushed hard for intramural over interscholastic sports. We had an advisory for several years, we experimented with an activity period, we were child oriented. After a summer staff-wide workshop we were on the verge of interdisciplinary teams. I was always proud to teach at Stewart during that period and felt we were on the cutting edge. This probably allowed for built-in support when in more recent times the MS philosophy was revisited."*

Dave McWilliams (1985-92): "Getting the Vision"

Dave McWilliams came to Talawanda City Schools from Texas in 1984 as assistant superintendent. In 1989, when the school district had to find quarters for students in the Methodist Church, he became the church principal. When he was the church principal, he was the first on-line school administrator. He remained assistant superintendent until 1993, when he became superintendent of nearby Ross Independent Schools.

> *"I feel that a lot of time and effort went into making the new building a middle school rather than a junior high. Dave McWilliams, assistant superintendent at that time, organized a committee to study what a middle school should look like, feel like, sound like.... A Miami professor was invited to help on the committee. Many teachers visited other middle schools in our region. Much discussion led to final decisions on the physical and the emotional environment of the new school."* – A Teacher

The Marvin Wilhelm Years (1988-92): "Getting TMS Started"

Marvin Wilhelm had been the Talawanda High School building principal until 1987, when he was assigned to Stewart Junior High School. He was at Stewart for two years and opened the new middle school in 1989. He served as building principal until 1993, when he retired. Marvin is credited, by those who were with him as TMS opened, with treating teachers very professionally on the heels of union action that closed the Talawanda City Schools for two weeks. Marvin devoted many hours to the successful opening of TMS.

The Phil Cagwin Years (1992-97): "Getting the Money"

Phil Cagwin was the building principal at Marshall Elementary until 1989, when he moved to Stewart Intermediate School. Most of his sixth-grade faculty at Marshall went to the new TMS in 1989. He served as building principal at Stewart until 1992, when he became the building principal at Talawanda Middle School. Marvin Wilhelm had retired. Phil was then reunited with his former Marshall staff.

> *"When I came here after Marvin, my former sixth-grade faculty members from Marshall came to me. One of the first things we looked at was Department Council. It was all Stewart faculty. We changed it to a Faculty Council."*

Phil Cagwin seems to have had a lasting impact in two areas. First, he integrated the sixth-grade teachers, who had been together at Marshall, into the decision-making process at the new TMS. Second, he recognized the importance of pursuing external funding to support faculty professional development. He encouraged it, supported it, and was successful at it. He created yet another opportunity for teacher-leaders to express their vision and needs when the first round of Venture Capital funding became available.

The Rhonda Bohannon Years (1997-Present): "Getting to the Next Level"

Rhonda Bohannon supported the partnership arrangement with Partners in Learning and encouraged teaching teams to commit to the investigating the impact of network technology. Her readiness for leadership at TMS can be traced back to 1986 and experience with Ohio's Classroom of the Future project. She came to Stewart and encouraged experimentation with Partners in Learning and then went to TMS to raise the bar.

> *"I see our new leadership as a catalyst."* – A Teacher

> *"Administrators need to make hard decisions. Rhonda seems to be very comfortable with this role."* – A Teacher

Mike Pavloff: "The Passionate Believer"

There was a thread that ran from Ray Kley, through Marvin Wilhelm, and into Phil Cagwin as building principals. The thread was Mike Pavloff. Mike Pavloff has emerged as a central figure in the forma-

tion and transformations of Talawanda Middle School. He served as the assistant principal during the tenures of Marvin Wilhelm at Stewart and TMS. He served during the tenure of Phil Cagwin. Mike is mentioned time and again by teachers in the building as being a kind of guardian of the middle school philosophy through several changes in principals. Everyone knows that principals rely on staff from prior administrations to help orient them as they assume new leadership roles. Mike kept his eye on any "*drift*" from the vision formed to influence TMS. He was watchful of the ghosts and issues at TMS. He was excited about SchoolNet, and his enthusiasm was contagious to administrators throughout the district. He is currently an assistant principal at Hamilton High School in Hamilton, Ohio.

> *Mike did the work all assistant principals have to do, but had the capacity to remember how it all got started and where it all might lead.* – A Teacher

> *Certainly such collaboration requires the vision of administrative leaders — the 'gung-ho' leadership of Mike Pavloff who made the transition from junior high to middle school so joyous; the guidance and wisdom of Marvin Wilhelm who, as our first principal, gave our building a sense of identity and pride; the caring of our next principal, Phil Cagwin, who encouraged us to pridefully pursue Blue Ribbon Schools status, Venture Capital, SchoolNet, School to Work, Raising the Bar, and other grants and awards that have prompted us to reach new levels of success.* – A Teacher

Effective teacher and administrative leadership has fueled TMS. Each building educator met a need and left a mark. The result that is so interesting is how a faculty that needed nurturing got a father figure; a faculty that needed money got an entrepreneur; and a faculty that now needs administrative leadership in technology has a champion of technology in the classroom.

Chapter Five

TMS Structures for Success and Transformation

TMS has a heart committed to student-centered learning. But it is the TMS head that keeps the heart focused. The team of professional educators leading TMS have various ways of succeeding in making TMS a functioning institution. These include the dialogic decision-making process that the educators have made their own, the governance structure and committees, and the scheduling. Finally, TMS educators have a special tool at their command that seems to have synthesized their functioning as a school body: technology.

Foundation: Dialogic Decision-Making Processes

Decisions are made at TMS in a dialogic form that seems to minimize long-term negative reactions to decisions and increases the probability of cooperation and implementation. What is so very interesting up close is the nature of the verbal behavior. Faculty members ask a lot of questions. They don't tell: they sell with accumulated information stimulated by legitimate questions regarding any topic. TMS teachers have their individual opinions and seem to be comfortable with dialogue as a cultural norm. Proactive behavior creates the time for this dialogue.

1. ***Somebody Thinks Something Needs to Be Discussed (Need Stage)***

   I usually have seen schoolwide faculty suggestions, discussions, and the decisions are made as a group as in faculty meetings or committee meetings. The decisions don't ever seem to be dictated at us.

   Departmentally, decisions are made by the reading and language arts teachers from all grade levels. Building-wide decisions are made in several ways. Input concerning issues are given to PAC representatives, who meet with the building administration and make recommendations. Committees also make recommendations to PAC, which are then acted on or sent out to tribes for feedback (Discipline Committee is an example).

2. ***Somebody Makes Sure it Gets into a Tribe, Grade Level, Subject Area, PAC or Lunch Discussion (Dialogue Stage)***

There are several overseeing decision-making committees: PAC and Venture. We want the ability to make and implement decisions in this building, but time is a barrier. We have to continue to trust those on certain committees to make some decisions for us."

We make them every day in tribes, committees, staff meetings, and in our own classrooms. I feel they are made as a group or individually by looking at our goals. I think everyone gets an equal amount of time to make their case. – A Teacher

3. ***Somebody Agrees to Find Out More About It (Information Stage)***

Building and program decisions are usually made following recommendations by a committee or a department. Sometimes a committee will survey the staff and faculty to help make a decision. – A Teacher

Most often, however, during building meetings, issues or concerns are addressed and a request for feedback to PAC representatives is issued. – A Teacher

Often these recommendations are sent back to tribes for more input, and decisions are made – A Teacher

4. ***Let's Vote On It (Consensus Stage)***

Decisions are made in different ways at different levels of the building. Many key decisions are made by tribes, teachers grappling with the daily challenges of front-line interaction. PAC concerns itself with building-wide policies, and its representatives dialogue with the tribes. Venture Steering makes decisions based on recommendations of action committees, and it also interacts with PAC. Individual building committees make decisions, and they report to PAC and/or Venture Steering. – A Teacher

The principals reserve the right to make decisions on individual students' discipline actions, etc. – A Teacher

Some decisions are made by the principal and/or assistant principal due to their urgency, and some decisions are made during building-level meetings. – A Teacher

5. ***Let's Do It! (Implementation Stage)***

Meetings at which ideas are presented, hammered out, and a consensus is reached then help everyone join in to implement the change. – A Teacher

We trust each other and work together. Once we agree that we are going to do something as a school, we all pitch in to make it work the best that it can. This just seems to be the way the place works. – A Teacher

All this meeting and researching takes time. This is where the promise of SchoolNet seemed to hold so much for schools engaged in extensive dialogue and shared decision making. Not everyone can be at every meeting. Not every representative is as good as every other representative at representing individual positions or reporting the need for more information. Time and energy are fixed variables. The committee structure at TMS was threatening to overwhelm the faculty and administration. Some way had to be found to create time inside an already busy day.

It is a paradox in that we have so many committees to analyze various situations and at times the decision-making process goes from committee to PAC and back to committee. Sometimes I am unsure about [whether] PAC or the committee have the authority to make the decision. I feel like the decision should go through PAC, as there I feel represented. I am not always represented on individual committees. – A Teacher

We are committee-crazy! Committees are good and it gets all your faculty involved. However, there is a problem with trying to do too much and being spread too thin. I was on the multidisciplinary committee for a year, and we felt that it was enough for our building to concentrate on one goal a year. Most of us felt that becoming technologically proficient was enough for last year. The committee structure is the organizational expression of core values and initiatives at Talawanda Middle School. – A Teacher

Most issues are usually brought to the whole group for discussion and a vote at a faculty meeting, which is held once a month. If a decision cannot be reached in this way, people take the issues back to their tribes (teams) and discuss it in smaller groups. Sometimes those tribe decisions are sent to the Principal's Advisory Council for a vote from that representative body, or sometimes it comes back to the whole group for a vote. If the administrator must make a decision, he or she usually does so based on solicited feedback from the staff. There are very few unilateral, administrative decisions. – A Teacher

Currently, decisions are made as a result of careful fact finding and discussion in committee. Each committee is autonomous but may make recommendation only to one or another of our supervisory committees. These larger committees serve to advise and consent to the recommendations of the action committees. Many actions or requests are approved at the top-level committee, and others are brought before the entire building staff for further review and discussion. Very little is decided at the whim of the building administration without passing through an opportunity for staff input. In this way, staff members achieve ownership of the policies, procedures, and budget of the school. – A Teacher

Most decisions made at TMS follow this same pattern. This is a faculty that wants to talk about what affects it. The TMS dialogic decision making is evolving to improve the quality of education. Moreover, this decision-making format is the foundation of TMS governance structure.

Building Governance Structure

The TMS building governance structure has not been static; in fact, it appears to have gone through four transformations. As the staff worked together over the years and problems with integration of staff into the decision-making process were uncovered, changes were made. Recently, the TMS faculty elected to use the opportunity created by the Raising the Bar Grant to reexamine the decision-making structures at TMS. Under the current principal's leadership, a new TMS committee structure was developed that integrates the goals of the new grant into the forums for decision making.

The organizational structure of TMS complements the mission and vision of the building. The TMS building governance is made up of the Principal's Advisory Committee, Faculty Meetings, Tribes, and Parent Teacher Group. When you go to a meeting of the entire faculty, you get the feeling that you are at a town meeting. PAC meetings feel like board of director meetings. Grade-level and subject-area meetings feel like neighborhoods get-togethers and tribe meetings are the scheduled family chats.

Principal's Advisory Committee

The Principal's Advisory Committee (PAC) is the chief policy group at TMS. The teachers who serve on the committee are building leaders. The PAC meetings could be compared to the board of directors. The PAC is the internal network infrastructure that connects building subcommittees dealing with such topics as technology, curriculum, climate, and student success.

PAC is serious business at TMS. If you serve, you go. If you go, you represent your constituency and report back to them. Faculty on PAC are expected to be prepared and contribute. Very little goes on at TMS that is not discussed first at PAC and then with tribes.

Subcommittees that report to the PAC may include the Raising the Bar/Technology Committee, Curriculum Committee, Climate Committee, Student Success and Student Activities Committees, Local Professional Development Committee, Discipline Committee, and Venture Capital Committee. The PAC may discuss the number of committees needed, types of committees, and other government structure matters. PAC minutes reveal discussion of other items such as grant opportunities and conferences that may need to be discussed within tribes, general school policy updates, schoolwide events, and reminders for staff procedural breaches.

The PAC minutes are posted on SchoolNet. All teachers have access to the conference folder that holds them. Anyone who has attended the meeting and notices a mistake can suggest the change using e-mail to whomever took the minutes.

Faculty Meetings

Full faculty meetings are reserved for major structural changes and shifts in vision or policy. They are not consumed by announcements. They do not happen with great frequency. But when they do, attendance is full. The teachers usually sit by grade levels. This seating pattern happens, in part, so teachers can conference as a subgroup as the larger discussion proceeds. The university researchers observed the full faculty meeting discussion on the "cut/no cut" in sports dilemma. There was passionate discussion on both sides of the issue. When it looked like tensions might be rising, one of the faculty members would stand up and ask student-centered questions like, *"Hey, what are we here for? What is best for our students? What have we done in the past on issues like this?"* This question helped to move the teachers to consensus.

The On a Roll List is an example of the creative solutions the TMS faculty is capable of producing consistent with the middle school philosophy and TMS mission. This faculty meeting included a review of current practices for improving proficiency test scores. Minutes from this meeting note:

A good portion of the meeting was spent on the development of an "On a Roll List" to recognize those students who are conscientious about doing work but never make the honor roll list. It was decided that to make the "On a Roll List" the following indicators would be evaluated: attendance – no more than 2 absences per quarter (administrative discretion could be used for students who missed more days due to an illness) classroom participation, cooperation,passing all subjects. If a student met the above qualifications they would be on the "On a Roll List" which would be printed in the newspaper.

Tribes

> *I feel the idea of the 'tribes' has contributed to our success. This gives teachers shared time to discuss individual students or matters that affect our students. I feel that the commitment of all staff has made our school a success.* – A Teacher

Tribes are like schools within the school. TMS is divided into six tribes, two for each grade level. Each tribe is made up of about six teachers and 125 students. Tribe meetings permit the management of day-to-day student intervention issues and seem to be the point of entry for curriculum and building issues.

Tribe affiliation has been essential to supporting individuals in our group and allowing thinking and problem solving to occur, to share concerns with parents, coming up with new programs, ideas, and the like. – A Teacher

The Tribe meetings play a big role in making decisions regarding individual students. Because the students in the tribe have the same core subject teachers, it is easier for teachers to keep track of problems a student may have, and the problems can be addressed sooner. – A Teacher

Tribe teams foster a sense of respect and cooperation between faculty and administration. – A Teacher

The tribe structure is truly one of the main reasons that make my school day a great one. My tribe works together well, brainstorms for new ideas, and probably more importantly is the fact that we provide each other with a support. – A Teacher

The tribe meetings seem to have a common structure regardless of grade level. The meetings have four phases: (1) the warm-up, (2) individual student intervention issues, (3) curriculum and building initiatives, and (4) resolution and cool-down. The warm-up is where you get your first taste of the collegial, interpersonal, and professional climate of the building. This phase is filled with questions about personal health, stress, and family. The gathering takes place along with the conversation. Snacks show up sometimes. Good humor seems to be attached to the opportunity to be listened to. These tribe meetings are fun to watch and be a part of. Then, the tribe meeting shifts into intervention. This stage characteristically focuses on individual learners, their behavior, their progress, what has been done, and what needs to be done. The conversation is pleasantly professional and sometimes mixed with the kind of humor that lets anyone in a stressful and complicated job laugh a bit and relieve pressure. These are teachers with professional clutches. They can shift gears, speeding up or slowing down, with remarkable synchrony. A total outsider would not get some of the humor.

The pattern of conversation at tribe meetings has to impact the overall climate of the building. If this culture of community is rehearsed every day, then it is not hard to imagine how the community would transfer to less frequent, but larger, grade-level, PAC, and faculty meetings. Anyone can introduce a topic. It is hard to determine who the tribe leader is. The dialogue is very democratic. If you had a tennis ball following the conversation, it would start with someone, move to everyone, go back by everyone once everyone had spoken at least once and then some decision would be made. This pattern is managed with professional manners and active listening. Interruptions are almost nonexistent. There was a "right of reversal" clause in any discussion. It seemed you could start a conversation with one position and gracefully change your mind without loss of ego or face. The participants don't seem to want to own a point of view too seriously because additional information from a colleague could make an original position invalid.

On this day, a parent has come in and met with one of the grade-level tribe teachers. He was concerned about his son's attitude toward school and the way he was starting to behave at home. He was reaching out for help. The teachers discussed the behavior they had observed in their classes and listened while the dad explained what had been happening at home. The meeting was informational and professional. Both the parent and the teachers gained insight into the other one's world with this young student. They agreed on a plan of action that would be tribe-wide and hopefully impact the student's attitudes at home and school. Interestingly enough, what this dad was seeing for the first time in his son's behavior, the teachers had seen many times before in class.

> *I am happy I came in to talk with all of you. I don't feel quite so alone now and have a better idea of what to say to him about your expectations. I appreciate the attention you are giving to him.* – A Parent

After the parent left, the teachers agreed on a course of action and to keep in touch with each other on what the boy was doing in class.

Parent Teacher Group

The active TMS Parent Teacher Group is a school network that provides parents and teachers with opportunities to work together on a wide range of school activities, from discussing "food-fight" policies to grant committees for program development such as Venture Capital and Raising the Bar. The PTG is the source of funding for teacher initiatives. Parents have a standing invitation to serve on all school committees.

At a recent PTG meeting, for example, the following invitations were announced:

- The PTG president had received an invitation from the school board to participate in the Superintendent's search.
- The TMS principal, in reporting to the PTG on the Continuous Vision for the Middle School, stated that there are five committees on which the school would like the parents to participate; the School Climate, Tech/Raising the Bar, Curriculum, Student Success, and Student Activities committees.

Meeting minutes also indicate that the PTG is involved in many school activities, including a conflict management/peer mediation program, a Family Fun Night, and a Technology Night.

Scheduling

Schedule construction is not fun work, unless you can see the full expression of a belief system in it. The building schedule was designed by the retired guidance counselor from the original Stewart Junior High School. The schedule became an extension of the middle school philosophy as interpreted by the teachers planning the building. It seems to have simply slipped *out of awareness* as one of the embedded structures of the building. The schedule was rarely mentioned by anyone.

> *"Involving staff members in the planning of the physical design of the building was crucial. Willingness to look at scheduling before the opening of the school was also important."*

The significance of the TMS building schedule cannot be overstated. The schedule seems to be accomplishing what it was intended to do. Teachers have a "tribe period" together to plan and focus on students. The activity period designed for students has created the opportunity for innovative, student-centered course offerings. Subject-area teachers share a common planning period across grade levels. Grade-level teachers have the opportunity to have lunch period together while aides supervise their grade-level lunches. This well-crafted peer access allows teachers in the same subject area to plan together. These same teachers then meet with their tribe members on a daily basis for 50 minutes. An anticipated problem attended to in advance is less likely to develop into a time-consuming problem. Scheduled opportunities to meet during the academic day reduce the time for required for crisis management after school or before school.

Faculty and staff at TMS are currently considering the modification of the building schedule that has served them well from the opening the building in 1989 to the present. The conversation at TMS on block scheduling is moving along a predictable pattern of decision making characteristic of TMS. The topic has been raised. There has been dialogue. More information has have been brought to the discussion. But, even a decision-making process does not eliminate the range of feelings always widened by the prospect of change. TMS is not immune from these passions. The following are all teacher comments on some of this anticipated change.

> *Alternative scheduling is a must in order to provide relief from crowded hallways and cafeteria, as well as to provide quality and quantity time for instruction.* – A Teacher

> *I believe that a more flexible (block) schedule will need to be implemented in order to meet all students' needs with existing staff and to provide fewer students per teacher, which will enable the teachers to plan more interdisciplinary units to promote true learning, understanding, and in-depth learning.* – A Teacher

We need to look into block or flex scheduling. We need to revisit the behavior system. We need to study the effects of inclusion on the 'typical' students, as well as the 'special needs' students. – A Teacher

As you look to the future of TMS, what issues or concerns do you see as important to the school's continued success? (1) to continue to work toward teaching more about cultural diversity; (2) to work out a block schedule; (3) to continue sending teachers to conferences; (4) to maintain or improve working together successfully as a staff. – A Teacher

SchoolNet Technology Comes to TMS

In the beginning — there were three Radio Shack computers at Stewart Junior High School with tape storage, no disks. Leadership in the integration of computers into the curriculum seems to have come consistently from the reading and language arts faculty. Individual departments like reading and language arts began to make decisions to pass on textbook adoptions, and instead to buy computers. As the computers came into the classrooms the amount of student-based work began to increase. This faculty was also the first to press for a mini-block schedule. The Venture Capital grants accelerated the acquisition of computers. All students were getting registered on Talawanda Learning Community Net in the TMS Computer Lab. Then one telephone line became two. The district Technology Committee committed to a mission statement and subcommittee organization that was most actively represented by TMS faculty. But, instructional life was pretty much the same in most classrooms.

In the early 1990s, large-group instruction had given way to cooperative groups at TMS. Classrooms were less likely to be organized by rows and more often organized in small clusters of desks. Learners were more likely to be working in groups solving a problem than listening to a lecture. Usually an attempt was made to make the student work authentically in nature with basic skills buried deep in the activity. There were more stand-alone computers in the language arts rooms and learners could be found editing reports or writing stories.

"In 1968, the high-end in social studies classroom technology was the overhead projector. In 1998, thirty years later, one of the social studies teachers at TMS has a Panasonic 27" TV, a PowerMac 5200/75LC, a Pioneer RS-232C Laserdisk CD, a Panasonic AG-1320 VCR, a ColorOne Apple Optical Scanner, and a Color Stylewriter 2500. This is all interconnected and mounted on a rack behind his workstation. He is getting ready to make the transition to a new Apple G3 and has three Apple I-Macs in his room for learner use. He and the learners have full Internet access and he uses multimedia software to deliver instruction. His workstation looks like the captain's cabin of the Starship Enterprise. His students can't wait to get to his classroom. He is the John Glenn of TMS. – A Teacher

The Talawanda City School superintendent was invited by the director of Partners in Learning to participate in a proposal, along with a consortia of businesses and Tri-Village Local Schools, to become one of 12 SchoolNet prototypes. The superintendent secured school board approval to pursue the project. Partners in Learning/SchoolNet was approved for funding in February 1995. The project provided funding for wiring and nothing else. Funding for wiring closets and computers needed to come from the district. The superintendent proposed a funding package that would permit the project to start almost immediately with GTE as the installer.

There was no funding for professional development. A group designed a two-week Playshop open to any teacher who was interested. No teacher was required to attend. The goal was to create a critical mass of Talawanda teachers who could advance the skills of SchoolNet. Once again, TMS faculty responded with curiosity and commitment.

> *"Getting the Venture Capital Grant has enabled us to do many things. One of the most significant was the networking of our computers. Many of us also took summer workshops to familiarize ourselves with the new way of communicating on our Intrabuilding/district e-mail system, FirstClass Client. This has revolutionized the way that we communicate with each other. This grant has also enabled most teachers to take advantage of professional conferences and workshops."*

> *"Without a doubt, technology in our school and our classrooms has affected how we teach and communicate with each other. Our thoughts, questions, requests are instantly displayed for our selected audience. Business is more efficient. My students have so much more available to them. Research, presentations, ways of communicating are in place that we haven't even thought of yet."*

Technology for Communication

One of the goals of Talawanda City School District Strategic Plan was to improve communication in the district. One of the goals of the Partners in Learning/SchoolNet prototype was to improve communication in the district. The goal of the Miami University Partners in Learning project was to design and build a learning system that would create a learning community and fully develop the human resources of the people in that community. The teacher reports consistently mention improved communication, connectivity, and opportunities for growth for faculty at TMS. Teachers can e-mail inside and outside the district. They have a chat feature that lets them check and see who is on-line, send them an invitation to chat, and have a real-time conversation via the computer. They can transfer files by attaching them to electronic mail. This system is supported by the most recent version of FirstClass Client

software made by SoftArc. Netscape supports teacher Internet communication with websites. Teachers who have student teachers are connected to their supervisors via the system. These student teachers are also able to connect with each other. The net effect of this capacity is a professional development telecommunity that reaches far beyond the classroom cooperating teacher. The following teacher comments provide impressive witness to the impact and application of SchoolNet technology on communication within TMS and the Talawanda City Schools.

> *"The Venture Capital grant gave us focus and direction. SchoolNet technology has improved communication greatly. Decisions made are easily communicated. Thoughts, ideas, concerns, ... are easily disseminated and feedback is immediate."*
>
> *"The installation of infrastructure for FirstClass has had an enormous impact. Using FirstClass to communicate to other staff was huge."*
>
> *"Internet, FirstClass, Netscape and other wonderful technology have opened us to almost unlimited growth."*
>
> *"I can keep track of what's going on around the building through FirstClass. I'm not late for or ignorant of a meeting."*
>
> *"It is often frustrating to think that important decisions must be made in a timely fashion, but that time is not available for all staff to participate as fully as we would like. The only roadblock to site-based decision making is the lack of time required to keep all constituents of the TMS learning community informed and engaged in important decisions. However, the great solution to this problem comes in the form of our electronic message system which can share important information building-wide instantaneously. We are fortunate to be able to request and gather input much more efficiently through our networked computers."*

SchoolNet has improved the efficiency of PAC. Current and past meeting minutes are stored and accessible. There is no way this volume of business gets done effectively without SchoolNet infrastructure. The school's capacity to position itself for multiple opportunities is directly related to SchoolNet infrastructure. SchoolNet is fully embedded into the day-to-day work of TMS.

On Friday afternoon of every week, the office secretary distributes next week's TMS *Bulletin* on SchoolNet. The bulletin is co-developed by the Rhonda Bohannon and her administrative team. This is updated every day during the week and then stored in a Bulletin Conference for reference. Only TMS teachers and administrators see the conference. Below is what one of the bulletins looks like.

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The SchoolNet TMS Bulletin

Monday

The musical scheduled for Monday morning has been canceled. It will not be rescheduled for an assembly. The evening performance is still scheduled for March 30, here at 7:30 p.m.

Special Education meeting, here, 3-5 p.m.

Tuesday

Health screenings

School to Work breakfast with business partners in the auditeria from 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.
6th grade career presentations will be immediately following and lasting until 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday

1:45 p.m. Work on grades

1:00 p.m. MFE meeting (Ottawa Tribe)-office conference room

3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Curriculum Council

6:30 p.m. Athletic meeting in the auditeria

Thursday

Life Saver Assembly (Train safety)-see assembly schedule from last week.

Foreign Language after school.

Friday

Life Saver Assembly (Train safety)-see assembly schedule from last week.

2:30 p.m. Special education teacher meeting-Ellen's room

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Dance

Upcoming events:

Fewer Than Five assembly on Tuesday, March 31

Tech Night 6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. here.

Technology for Instruction

Teachers and administrators at TMS were among the most interested and engaged with SchoolNet when the system was turned on in June 1996. On measures of stages of concern, the participating faculty measured as the least resistant to SchoolNet. Over 30 percent of the faculty enrolled in the first Playshop. They learned how to use the Macintosh 5500s, FirstClass Client communications software, ClarisWorks, and Netscape. They built a desktop to begin the school year with and went home for the summer. The reports below will give the reader a sense of the impact of these new tools on classroom instruction. There are some very powerful commentaries on perceived competence, improved instruction, the integration of special education, interdisciplinary curriculum planning, and teacher self-respect.

Venture Capital has enabled us to get a lot of technology with which we can pull in resources from the outside that enhance our curriculum. It has freed us from doing a lot of tedious paperwork/record keeping. It has given us more time to spend on planning instruction. – A Teacher

This year I have been keeping my grades on the computer. I feel tremendously more organized and accurate. As a professional, I have my head together and know where to access all my records! I can quickly print out a student report for parents, counselors, etc. The printouts are easy to read. If I misplace my attendance sheet, I know from the computer list who is absent that day. All of this assumes that my computer has come to me through Venture Capital! Thank you, thank you! – A Teacher

I do know that without the computer on my desk, I would not make worksheets and various instructional printouts that help me better teach and reach the kids. My handouts are so nice to look at! I can also iron out/correct mistakes, revise aspects of an assignment that did not work, and so on. Without this, I would more often rely on textbook sentences and worksheets which do NOT appeal to or connect with the students. They need activities custom-suited to their needs (grammar, spelling, reading level, etc.). I also have the freedom to try something new. I am constantly revising spelling lists on the computer, but I often come up with an idea for a spelling exercise — grid, graphic — that I use the computer to make on the spur of the moment, often for the next day. In teaching writing for the proficiency tests, I typed up a sample essay written by me, printed it in a small font, neatly blocked into paragraphs with marginal notes for instruction. I then printed out a copy in a very large font to make a bulletin board about proficiency writing. I could go on and on. – A Teacher

I think the implementation and use of technology through the use of Venture Capital money has truly improved the way teachers are instructing their students, as well as how the

students look at the teachers. There is more respect for a teacher who can relate to the students on this new technological level. I think overall teachers have more time to dedicate to teaching, because of technology and other implementations that were possible due to VC money. Also I believe they have more time to find new methods of teaching through professional development! – A Teacher

The computer network has also improved the quality of instruction. For example, a regular education teacher can upload a test and send it to a special education teacher, who can download the test and make revisions and modifications, and then send it back looking almost exactly like the original test (so the student is not singled out or embarrassed by the modifications). Because of the wiring made possible by the Venture Capital Grant, students can research topics on the Internet.

Our building being 'networked' and the push for interdisciplinary instruction has stretched us all.

Classroom observations and documentation on system use support these self-reports. TMS teachers have a log-on pattern that begins when they first come to school. These early birds often check their e-mail three and four times during the school day. They have a tendency to measure the demands of the message that has been sent to them and decide whether to toss it, respond with something short, or wait until lunch or after school to provide a more extensive response. The first impact of SchoolNet on instruction was clearly in the resource access domain. Teachers started using the system to acquire more current and more authentic information to compliment existing lessons. The next stage of impact was the redesign of lessons with access to the Internet or use of the computer integrated into the lesson. The third stage appears to be the design of lessons that are shaped to targeted learning outcomes and multimedia applications. Professional development and the rate and direction of technology skill acquisition continues to be a focus of study at TMS. Teachers are currently participating in tests to establish certification levels at the novice, practitioner, scholar, and expert levels with technology.

Chapter Six

Tensions in the Transformation Process

At Talawanda Middle School, all the grade levels have leaders with voice and vision. There seems to be a significant group of teachers who are willing to be persuaded on issues. These teachers need to see someone else explore and resolve the risks. This caution seems reasonable. Noteworthy is the almost total absence of resistors. It is very difficult to find a faculty member who will resist any effort to change.

Nevertheless, TMS teachers don't all eat together. Not everyone likes everyone, but you have to live there a long time to notice who avoids whom; it's not on the surface. To suggest that there are no problems at TMS would diminish the impressive nature of what moves the place and insult the experienced reader. This chapter will cover some of the issues that exist at TMS, both resolved and unresolved.

The Ghosts of TMS

Some of the issues that have existed at TMS were a matter of history predating the school. In 1981, when the school district consolidated, many of the teachers who taught in neighborhood country elementary schools like Hanover and Riely were transferred to Oxford schools. When this happened, county teachers lost their schools and their influence. This built some resentment that, while diminished, is still referred to.

A similar problem of loss of teacher influence was found within the TMS building itself. In the early years of TMS, the former Stewart Junior High teaching staff was formidable. The former Marshall Elementary teachers did not have equal say in how things went. The problem seems to have been exacerbated by administrators who had familiarity with one group of teachers but not the other; the teachers from Marshall remained outside of the decision-making process partly because the administrator at the time had been from Stewart himself. As a result, the sixth-grade teachers were not participating in

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the inner circle of policy makers and decision making in the first year. This problem was eventually fixed when several trusted friends from the sixth- and eighth-grade faculty agreed that something needed to be done or serious morale problems were going to occur.

Another area of teacher division was a teacher work stoppage, or strike, in 1989 that had a nasty side to it. Teachers were in picket lines. The school board and administration hired substitutes. Picket lines were crossed by some substitutes and some teachers. Some Stewart teachers report having been very active in the strike. While an "us vs. them" mentality does not seem to exist at TMS now, it did exist and may still exist between teachers who were active in the strike and central office administrators. A plus, however, is that the strike is continually mentioned by some TMS teachers as a bonding experience that stimulated resolve and a proactive culture.

Current Issues

In addition, there are some power groups that know they have influence at TMS. They work hard, so it is hard to be too critical, but they are there, and this does breed some resentment. For example, the Principal's Advisory Committee (PAC) is perceived by some as being controlled by a few people. The flip side is that there are some faculty members who have little voice because of who they are, not because they have no chance to speak. Some faculty are concerned they need to be heard, regardless of the quality of their thinking. And there are others who do not want to be involved in all the decisions, yet not having the time to participate can be sometimes interpreted as not being interested.

There are also teachers who do not feel they have a voice but who are less likely to take initiative, contribute outside the school day, or take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. Not everybody thinks all the committees are a good idea, either.

> *I'm not very involved in the decision-making process at TMS, but I assume the PAC makes the major decisions, with input from representatives of the tribes and departments. I do provide input in . . . department meetings and the Technology Committee meetings.*
> – A Teacher

Not all teachers are in tribes, either, and this seems to continue to cause some resentment. The schedule puts tribe teachers together but isolated them from extended basic teachers. Teachers who work in the activities components of the curriculum — such as health, music, art, and industrial technology — have a different view of how things sometimes get done at TMS. Tribes, identity in a department, or identity as a Stewart or Marshall teacher can all affect the image of complete unity at TMS.

> *The tribe organization has probably fostered closer working relationships. I am sure that the Marshall teachers, coming here from a small, "tight" building, brought a close-knit togetherness. I worry that the organization of the building and the "tribe" planning and the grade-level lunch have probably been a bit divisive, as we get precious little opportunity to interact in a social manner across the larger building.* – A Teacher

Another area of friction is that there have been some top-down decisions at TMS. Not every administrative decision, however informed, has been perceived as a good one. This doesn't happen often, but it happens. Each building principal had faculty who like him/her and some who did not. Some of the appeal of each principal seems to be related to who was getting what they wanted. In a related matter, not every teacher from Stewart who wanted to be involved in the planning of the new TMS building was included in the process; this tension seems to have passed, but it is another instance of teachers feeling excluded from decision making.

Finally, there are faculty members who continue to believe that the district administration is adversarial, even though few administrators are where they were five years ago. This perceived external threat can stimulate in-group cohesiveness, but external partnerships and inter-organizational collaboration are more evident as time goes by.

A few other issues with teachers at TMS are related to curriculum or technology. For example, at-risk learners get a lot of attention and funding at TMS. There is concern that gifted students may not be getting a fair share. In the area of technology, the network has made the building a little smaller, but it has brought more information to the desktop of each teacher. Some feel they are relying too much on SchoolNet and not making the effort to be together and talk often enough in person.

What is important in the case of TMS is that the core values of student-centeredness, professionalism, initiative, hard work, collaboration, and continual improvement do seem to guide the personal actions of the faculty and administration. If there is gossip at all schools, then there seems to be less of it at TMS. If there is selfishness at all schools, it is harder to find at TMS. If there are ghosts at all schools, then there are not as many at TMS.

Of course, one issue related to much of what is done at TMS is that of Money: Some are worrying about what will happen when the grant money is gone. The grant money itself has brought its own issues, which are addressed next.

Grant "Side Effects

There are concerns expressed by many teachers that could be called "grant side effects." They are not all mentioned by all of them, but they can be problematic to any organization.

1. *How often can a system change before it stops being a system and just becomes a series of changes punctuated by regrouping?*
2. *How much can you ask of any faculty member or administrator before the stress becomes too much?*
3. *How involved can teachers get in decision making before they lose time for quality teaching?*
4. *Does everyone want the pressure of high visibility and high expectations?*
5. *Just because a grant is available, is it one that needs to be pursued?*
6. *Do the resources provided by grants create morale and climate problems of their own?*
7. *Is it possible to put in danger what you do well by constantly seeking to do more?*

TMS is a school building with faculty that has learned to think ahead. They are asking the good questions. Once grants are received, there is a tendency for schools to not cultivate the partnerships that may have produced the grants. This is new ground for many faculty, administrators, and partners. Longitudinal, external partnering requires a skill set of its own.

Chapter Seven

The TMS Success Story

The information collected in this case study lends important support to a body of information on school improvement. A core group of believers with a shared pattern of decision making, supported by the proper resources, and focused on the right goals can sustain the capacity to change. TMS faculty has brought commitment to opportunity and has in turn enhanced professionalism. Our evidence places Talawanda Middle School squarely inside the existing research reports. A close reading of the teacher self-reports gives strong evidence to this relationship.

Research on School Reform and TMS Transformations

Strehle (1996) reports a comprehensive review of the research on the characteristics of schools that have the capacity to transform themselves, as well as benchmarks to measure the stages of change. The following studies are extracted from that review. (Emphasis added.)

> Purkey and Smith (1983) conducted major reviews of the school effectiveness literature. Two recurring and significant characteristics that were found in the literature review were: *joint planning by the staff and considering the school as a whole. Staff agreement on goals for the school* was an important focus because the faculty was viewed as the ones controlling the outcome of change efforts. *Cooperative problem-solving to develop ownership and commitment* to the improvement efforts was another significant finding. Therefore, *decision-making strategies that were collaborative and collegial* were considered the most effective at promoting ongoing and lasting school improvement. Coupled with this emphasis on faculty involvement in decision-making was *the need for leadership, either from the principal or from key staff members that could include informal teacher leaders, a critical mass of teachers, or people in other leadership positions such as department chairpersons.*

Levine (1991) describes this combination of leadership and involvement as "directed autonomy," *or the stimulus and support for change coming from the top of the organizational hierarchy, and planning for and making decisions about specific changes coming from the bottom.*

Fullan (1992) reports that effective schools were found to promote norms of continuous improvement. In such settings, faculty members *collegially analyze, experiment, and evaluate together. Opportunities for such collaboration are built in* rather than being left to chance. Faculty *interaction focuses more on professional concerns* than on social conversation. Collegial interchanges primarily involve discussion of what types of student achievement are most desired and what indicators of achievement will be monitored.

Rosenholtz (1989) concluded that collegial discussion about improving instruction distinguished successful schools from those that were not successful in meeting their goals for student achievement. *Student success was found to be related to teacher commitment that derived from a sense of efficacy, a sense that one's efforts were effective.* A higher sense of efficacy and higher commitment was present in schools in that students were more successful and these schools were characterized by teachers openly and frankly exploring together how to improve instruction. Conversely, in schools characterized by low efficacy, teachers' discussions tended to center on poor working conditions.

Conclusions

This case study suggests that for a school building to become a transformative learning community, a set of events needs to occur, and these events may need to occur in a particular sequence. This would explain why so few school buildings achieve the capacity to transform.

1. A clear vision has to be collaboratively established that is grounded in a commitment to learners and a climate of professional behavior.
2. A core group of teacher-leaders needs to be active and complemented by supportive administrators who are comfortable with shared decision making.
3. School-based initiatives are more likely to materialize if they are supported by community-wide understanding of the goals of the school district.

4. Positioning of the school vision must be consistent with state and federal sources of funding to optimize the accumulation of resources for change.

5. Functional partnerships with organizations and people outside the school community can provide the resources in perspective, time, and energy to fuel transformations.

6. The inclination and capacity of the faculty to effectively pursue external funding will increase the resources necessary to move from one organizational form to another, more functional form.

7. District-wide computer network technology can transform school cultures and, properly developed, will increase the capacity of a school to transform itself from one organizational form to another, more functional form.

In these five years, we have transformed how we do our business as educators. Venture Capital gave us the ability to pursue personal growth as professionals, to take charge of our own programs and policies, and to begin a journey which has brought us into the age of technology. Instructional improvements have been as continuous as our own professional development. We now use computers to communicate professionally and collegially among the staff, to provide a world of resources to our students, and to prepare learners for their future. At this point on the road, we have not yet attained a level of comfort with technology that empowers teachers to embrace computers as a regular tool in the classroom, but we are not too far away from that vision. Our journey continues as Ohio's Raising the Bar Grant will further encourage the connection between technology and curricula. More importantly, we are an empowered staff that looks with newfound excitement, pride, and dedication toward the future of education. – A Teacher

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APPENDIX
METHODOLOGY

A district research team was formed that originally included a former assistant principal from TMS, a university researcher from Miami University, and three classroom teachers from TMS. The assistant principal left for another assignment in Hamilton City Schools and was replaced by the new TMS principal. The team met several times with Ontario project leaders. Data collection began with conversations during the first statewide project meetings during the summer of 1997. An online survey was completed by all but a few members of the TMS staff in November 1997. A videotape was made of all classrooms and the building to record classroom organization and culture. A videotape was made of conversations between retired faculty and administrators in February 1998. A parent survey was sent home to parents, and a series of site visits within each grade level were made during the spring 1998 semester. Student teachers assigned to the building were interviewed in the spring. An on-line dialogue was carried on throughout the construction of this manuscript to ensure content accuracy. Member checks, data, analytic categories, interpretations, were examined by selected faculty as the ethnography matured. The original draft document was created by the university researcher and reviewed and improved by the TMS members of the writing team.

Direct observations included the following: (1) classrooms where teachers were involved teaching interdisciplinary units; (2) classrooms where teachers were integrating technology into the teaching and learning process; (3) classrooms where teachers were using or trying out the kinds instructional strategies/skills introduced or emphasized in recent years (e.g., authentic learning and assessment, cooperative group learning, problem and project-based learning); (4) classrooms where new school-to-work activities and illustrations of special education inclusion were underway; (5) tribe team meetings; Venture Capital Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings; (6) technology, interdisciplinary, school climate, needs-based learners, and other kinds of team or staff meetings that reflected changes in the work of teachers over the past few years; (7) professional-development activities reflective of the staff's efforts to bring change into the teaching/learning process, school governance, and community involvement.

On October 9, 1997, faculty members at TMS were introduced to the University of Toronto Project Data Collection Plan. The on-line questionnaire was put on-line. Analysis of these data began in October. Faculty interviews were completed by December 19, 1997. Draft review by faculty will occur during March 1998. Final draft of manuscript was completed in January 1999.

The data collection plan within the TMS component of the study will have four phases: History/Foundations, Guided Reflections, Direct Observation, and Member Validations.

Phase One: History/Foundations

The History/Foundations phase was characterized by investigating through interviews with critical actors (e.g., teachers, administrators) the form decisions made that appear to have shaped the early directions of TMS in staffing, building design, and curriculum design. Every attempt was made to identify spans in staff assignments to the building, turnover of faculty and leadership, board support, and community involvement. Attention was paid to critical events that in the perceptions of participants shaped the early activities contributing to current status of the building's management, instructional, and climatic environments. There will be interviews with board members, community members, and teachers with histories in the district that reach back to the early planning for the school.

Phase Two: Guided Reflections

The Guided Reflections phase was a SchoolNet-supported invitation for reflection by all 51 teachers and administrators on critical questions related to the conceptual organizers of the project (i.e., collaboration, inquiry, and integration within the classrooms, corridors, and boardrooms). Questions were posted within a Venture Capital Conference on SchoolNet. Teachers were invited to reflect and record their responses on specific days set aside for data collection. Participation was encouraged by tribe leaders, the building principal, and grade-level leaders. These data were organized within each question where themes and points of departure could be identified. This data collection strategy will permit accurate accounts of teacher perceptions and remembrances. Independent contributions will permit validation of critical events, actors, and outcomes.

SchoolNet On-Line TLC Questionnaire Introduction

Background

In the spring of 1997, Talawanda Middle School was selected from a pool of over 600 Venture Capital grant recipients as a case study within Ohio's Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) project. The TLC project was coordinated by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) and includes 11 other schools in Ohio. The purpose of the study was to "conduct case studies of selected schools that have made significant progress in recent years in improving the quality of education in their schools." The case study team is to author a case study that captures the dynamics of change at TMS.

Information Collection System

The research began with on-line participant completion of an introductory questionnaire on FirstClass. Responses to the questions will be organized by question and reviewed for emerging themes

and consistencies. Team members conducted selected interviews with individuals and focus groups, including parents and students. The focus groups were selected based on a rational sample of constituents (i.e., grade level, content area, building leadership teams, etc.) There was some review of artifacts from the school like planning documents, the technology plan, and other grant initiatives.

Phase Three: Direct Observation

The research team used videotape to document the learning environment as it is expressed in room arrangements, teacher workstations, wall artifacts, and available tools for teaching and learning. Direct observation of classroom processes will be initiated at this stage. Interviews were conducted with parents, building staff, and community members.

Phase Four: Member Validations

The Member Validations phase was characterized by personal interviews and member checks on the validity of points of departure that may be significant to the case write-up. This phase will include the preparation of a draft case report that will be reviewed by the case-study team for accuracy and conclusions.

Questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire at your convenience. Some time will be provided during our November 4 inservice day to work on this project. Due to our deadline, please complete the questionnaire no later than November 12. Thoughtful and reflective responses will improve the accuracy, cross validation, and overall quality of the final document. All the responses will be confidential. No names will appear in the case study. You will have an opportunity to review the draft case study for accuracy before it is turned in to the TLC project leaders. This is not an evaluation of the building or you. This is network-supported inquiry into the dynamics of change at TMS. Other schools in the project are using a personal interview/note-taking transcription/report strategy. We felt that we could save you time and energy and improve accuracy if we invited you to respond to this series of questions first, with the understanding that a follow-up interview with some of you for clarification or elaboration might be informative. Please review the questions and answer them when you have time to be reflective and thoughtful. Use the Reply with Quote option in the Message menu. Move the cursor to write your answer under each question as you go.

1. Briefly describe your history with Talawanda City Schools. Discuss previous placements, grades taught, years of service, supplemental contracts, etc.

2. What assignments, events or committees in prior educational positions had an impact on the evolution of TMS?

3. What do you believe were/are contributing factors in the success of the middle school?

4. Can you remember significant events and/or decisions that have contributed to the success of the middle school?

5. In what ways have the changes that have occurred at TMS since 1992, which was the year of the acquisition of the Venture Capital Grant, affected the quality of instruction in the building?

6. In what ways have the changes that have occurred at TMS since 1992, which was the year of the acquisition of the Venture Capital Grant, affected the quality of your professional life?

7. Are there any unique relationships at TMS that have contributed to the middle school's success?

8. How are decisions made at TMS?

9. How do the faculty and staff anticipate or respond to external events that impact the school?

10. What organizational structures in the school support or frustrate the decision-making process?

11. As you look to the future of TMS, what issues or concerns do you see as important to the school's continued success?

12. As you look to the future of TMS, what barriers or catalysts do you see as important to consider?

13. Are there any other comments or issues that you feel would contribute to the case study?

Thank you for taking the time to thoughtfully complete these questions.

NOTES

NOTES

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES SITES

TALAWANDA MIDDLE SCHOOL
Talawanda City Schools
Miami University

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

1 **Brentmoor Elementary School**
Mentor Exempted Village Schools
Cleveland State University

2 **Cranwood Learning Academy**
Cleveland City Schools
Cleveland State University

3 **Dawson-Bryant Elementary School**
Dawson-Bryant Local Schools
(Lawrence County)
Ohio University

4 **Lomond Elementary School**
Shaker Heights City Schools
Cleveland State University

5 **Miami East North Elementary School**
Miami East Local Schools
(Miami County)
Miami University

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

6 **East Muskingum Middle School**
East Muskingum Local School
(Muskingum County)
Muskingum College
Ohio University

7 **Galion Middle School**
Galion City Schools
The Ohio State University

8 **Talawanda Middle School**
Talawanda City Schools
Miami University

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

9 **Federal Hocking High School**
Federal Hocking Local Schools
(Athens County)
Ohio University

10 **Franklin Heights High School**
South-Western City Schools
The Ohio State University

11 **Reynoldsburg High School**
Reynoldsburg City Schools
The Ohio State University

12 **Robert A. Taft High School**
Cincinnati City Schools
Miami University

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